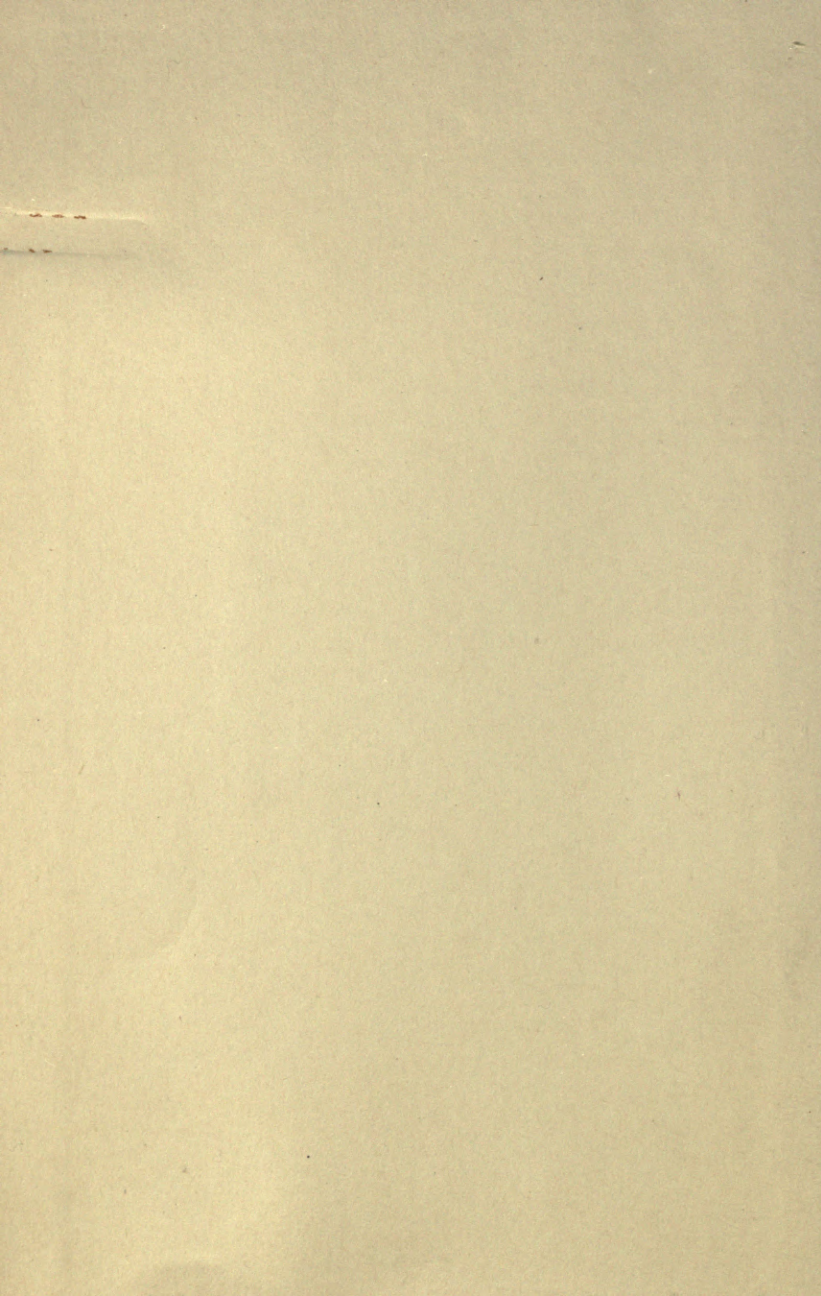
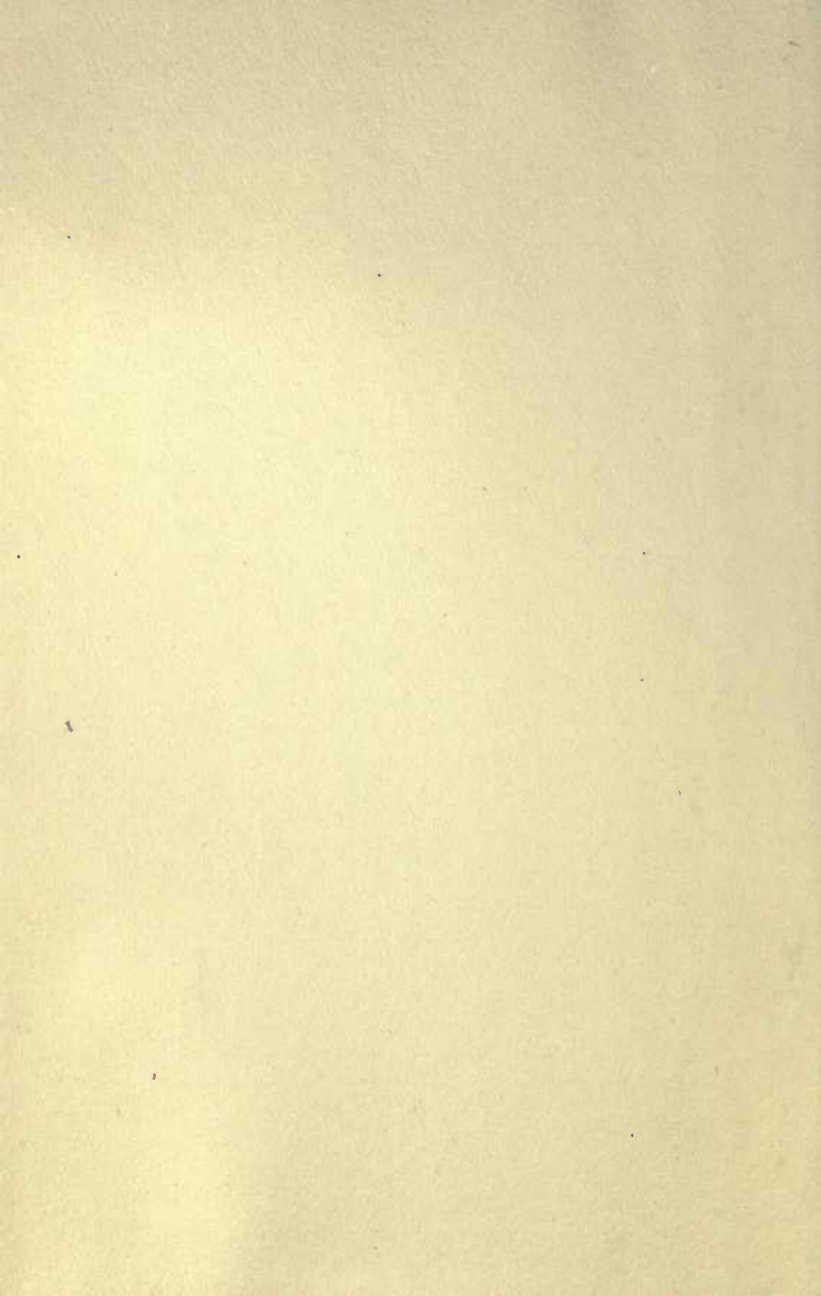


The
More Excellent
Way

Cyrus
Townsend
Brady





By Cyrus Townsend Brady

And Thus He Came
The More Excellent Way



"O GOD!" SHE CRIED, "DON'T COME HERE! I DIDN'T UNDER-
STAND—YOU SAY YOU LOVE ME—GIVE ME A CHANCE—I—"

Drawn by E. L. Crompton.

(Chapter 11.)

The More Excellent Way

**Being the Determinative Episodes in the
Life of**

Chrissey de Selden, Hedonist

By

Cyrus Townsend Brady

**Author of "The Island of Surprise," "Web of Steel," "The
Island of Regeneration," etc., etc.**

**G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press**

1916

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BY
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REVISED AND ENLARGED EDITION
COPYRIGHT, 1916
(Under title of *The More Excellent Way*)
BY
CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

To

BILLIE AND ELLA GRAY

WHOSE FRIENDSHIP I VALUE HIGHLY AND RETURN FULLY

2229263

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

Dr. Brady's story was first published as a serial under the title *Whom God Hath Joined*, and in this form it secured favorable attention from a very wide circle of readers. The author found later that the title selected for the serial had already been utilized for the American edition of a volume published some years back and he decided, not on the ground of infringement of copyright, because the earlier story was not protected by copyright, but in a spirit of comity to his friend the publisher of the earlier book, to replace his original title with the wording now selected.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author makes grateful acknowledgment to J. Stuart Blackton of the Vitagraph Company of Brooklyn, Ray Long of the Story Press Corporation of Chicago, and Edward D. Jones of Tait & Hays, Brokers, of New York, for valuable suggestions and criticisms by virtue of which the story has taken its present shape. And in making this cordial acknowledgment, the author couples it with an undivided assumption of responsibility for all that follows.—C. T. B.

THE HEMLOCKS
PARK HILL, YONKERS, N. Y.
September, 1916.

CONTENTS

BOOK I

THE INSULT

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—BRANDED	3
II.—A PASSAGE AT ARMS	13
III.—ONE WAY OUT	26
IV.—BAFFLED SUITORS	37
V.—THE WOMAN ON THE STAIR	46
VI.—THE REVELATION	55
VII.—TEMPTATION	64
VIII.—THE VOICE OF SOCIETY	79
IX.—THE PLEA OF THE BREAKING	89

BOOK II

WEDDED

X.—AFTERNOON	109
XI.—NIGHT	118
XII.—MORNING	125

BOOK III

THE "STILL-VEXED BERMOUTHES"

XIII.—ONCE MORE THE SEA	141
XIV.—"THE POSY OF A RING"	152

CHAPTER	PAGE
XV.—“A-E-I”	163
XVI.—OVERHEARD IN THE DUSK	173
XVII.—AND THUS HE CAME	182
XVIII.—“LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION”	187
XIX.—THE MAN WINS	195
XX.—CAVE MEN	205
XXI.—SHE MUST GO ON	217

BOOK IV

THE VALLEY OF DECISION

XXII.—ON DIFFERENT SHIPS	227
XXIII.—“LA DONNA É MOBILE”	240
XXIV.—DISAPPROVAL	249
XXV.—ENCOURAGEMENT	258
XXVI.—CROSSING THE RUBICON	273

BOOK V

DIVORCED

XXVII.—A BITTER TASTE	283
XXVIII.—TO MAKE OR BREAK	293
XXIX.—SWEPT AWAY	308
XXX.—RECEIVING THE NEWS	318

BOOK VI

THE FAILURE

XXXI.—THE WOMAN OF THE STREET	325
---	-----

Contents

ix

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXXII.—HOME	333
XXXIII.—THE PLEA OF THE BROKEN .	339
XXXIV.—THE PASSING	346
XXXV.—BRAVE MAN OR COWARD ? .	351

BOOK VII

THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

XXXVI.—THE PRICE FOR FOLLY . .	359
XXXVII.—ANOTHER CHANCE . . .	369
XXXVIII.—BROKEN HONOUR . . .	378
XXXIX.—STILL PLAYING THE GAME .	388
XL.—OVERRULED	396
XLI.—THE SURRENDER	407
XLII.—ONCE MORE A WEDDING NIGHT	417

BOOK I
THE INSULT

CHAPTER I

BRANDED

IN horror she stared at the prostrate man's face, white from unconsciousness and whiter still in the moonlight. Shame and bitter resentment against outraged modesty and shattered hope filled her heart.

Although a moment before she had been in his arms, as she had certainly loved him in her soul, now a passionate desire to grind his face ruthlessly with her heel possessed her. She could feel the touch of his hot hand on her cool flesh. She would feel it forever. It seemed to her appalled fancy to be impressed upon her white skin like a brand; as they found dead Hester Prynne's scarlet letter outlined on her breast beneath the character she had worn so long. Her neck and shoulders, pearl-like and translucent in the moonlight, suddenly crimsoned; whereat she was glad. The gules of shame overspread and concealed the blot of insult.

After the dinner-party on the terrace of the Victoria at Sorrento had broken up they had come together again. During the repast they had been

separated by the length of the table. Her escort, a young Italian officer of the Bersaglieri, the Duca di Attavanti, had so monopolized her attention, with John Warburton on the other side of her at the head of the table, that she had scarcely been able to do more than exchange glances with Richard Neyland at the farther end. She had caught his eyes full upon her and they had told her unmistakably what she had foreseen and indeed longed to know.

When the women left the table to the men she had withdrawn with the others and had gone to the back of the lift tower that rose above the terrace and provided a way for the guests to visit the *marina* three hundred feet below. She had stood there leaning over the stone balustrade looking out across the quiet water toward the row of far-off lights along the shore where pleasure loving Naples lay overshadowed by the huge bulk of Vesuvius, its royal crown of smoke blotting out the stars. The moon shone over the still sea and there was a great star over the square tower on a summer villa off to the left. It reminded her of *Mario* and *Trovatore* and Meredith's *Aux Italiens*.

"The one star over the tower," she said softly to herself, and then Mario came.

Back of her through the screen of olive trees in their huge green tubs the lights of the hotel sparkled. There were other parties dining on the terrace. Laughter, the murmur of pleasant voices, the ring of touched glasses, ice tinkling therein,

blended softly with the murmurous background of that soft Italian night of springtime.

And so he came. He had left the other men abruptly with a half-muttered excuse and had sought her. The people on the terrace were not a dozen paces away but there in the narrow passage back of the elevator tower they were alone with the moon and the stars and the sky and the sea and the night wind. That she loved him was shown by the fact that she recognized his step albeit it had rung unsteadily on the hard tiling of the terrace. Although her back was toward him her soul went out to him coming as he came. He had stopped behind her.

"Miss de Selden—Chrissey—Chris," he whispered and then she faced him.

How white, how handsome he looked in the moonlight; big, broad-shouldered, strong. How well his evening clothes became him. He swayed a little as he stood there. She thought it due to the violence of his emotions and perhaps it was in part, but something—she could not tell what, was it maidenly hesitation or reluctance?—made her shrink back against the railing. Her left hand caught the iron ring of one of the tubs that held an oleander. She would never breathe the fragrance of that flower again, without remembering that hour.

"Mr. Neyland," she whispered half-afraid and yet tremulously anxious for his next words.

She had never lacked suitors since her brilliant

début two years before. Men had loved her madly and, to do them justice, not for her money alone. It was an open secret that she could have the Duca di Attavanti for the lifting of her hand. Yet for all her triumph in society, which had begun a little to pall upon her, she stood trembling and expectant in that hour like any romantic school girl, for no one had ever stirred her heart as Neyland.

She had almost come to believe that she never would experience that unforgettable thrill of responsive passion until Neyland had suddenly come into her life. He had set himself to win her and, moved by what strange fancy she could not tell, she had allowed herself to be won. There was no apparent reason why the two should not marry. In birth, in fortune, in education Neyland was a fitting match for the last little De Selden, standing before him waiting like a captive the expression of the victor's will. In character? Ah, there was a discrepancy. She had not detected it but she was soon to find it out.

"I can't wait longer," said the man. "Why should I? You know that I love you. You can't know how much. I can't measure it. It grows all the time. It is impossible that a love like mine should not have awakened something in your heart. I am all humility before you and yet, don't you—can't you—?"

He steadied himself not coming any nearer but fixing her with his gaze. She had never noticed

before how bright his eyes were. Under the compulsion of his passion she answered the broken interrogation by a slow, yielding nod.

"God!" he whispered in exultation.

He took a step nearer to her. In a sudden inexplicable alarm she suddenly thrust out her hand. Yet what had she to fear for he loved her as she loved him? Her open palm met his breast. He was checked for a moment and although she stiffened her arm his left hand clasped it and moved it away a little roughly. Then she was conscious of the heavy odour of wine upon his breath. She had never known him to drink a drop before. And no one had told her that his abstemiousness was on account of her, and that it had only been practised since he had made her acquaintance. She knew little of his past.

He turned slightly as he moved toward her and his face was at once clearly illuminated in the bright moonlight. She could see every feature, every expression. It was handsome still but satyric, diabolic, degrading. It frightened her although she was yet uncomprehending. Now Neyland had that deep and unbounded reverence for purity and innocence which is more often than not exhibited by the rake who has mainly dealt with the other kind of womanhood. Never had he offered to Chrissey de Selden the least familiarity. In his treatment of her he had been delicacy and refinement itself. She was unprepared for the terrible unexpected.

In his senses Neyland would rather have died than have affronted her modesty, outraged her feelings, and killed her affection. For love of her he had abandoned old habits, overcoming by hard struggle the desperate temptation. Some men can play with fire with impunity for a long time. Neyland could scarcely warm his hands at the blaze without getting burned. One drink was his undoing. Free he was one man, bound quite another. Some men wallow in the pitch and seem outwardly for the time being little the worse, others can not touch it without defilement.

So Neyland drank and fell. That which he would not he did and that which he would he did not. "Most men," said one who knew, "kill the thing they love." Neyland's weakness, or rather the sudden accession of strength he allowed to the evil that was in him, as it is in all of us, slew something in Chrissey de Selden. Resent it as she might she could never after be quite the same.

Madly the man rushed to his doom. For one moment of weakness he was to pay a fearful price. And she, too, must pay. The beaded bubbles at the brim of the cup brought him to disgrace his manhood, and they involved her in shame. He did not realize this, did not give it a thought. That would come later. He only saw her, not in the high and noble way in which she usually appeared to him, but just as a woman, beautiful, tempting, loving, yielding—his own!

"Ah," he exclaimed again his voice still low but

hoarse and fraught with something that chilled her blood, "to possess you, beautiful."

She stood like one bewitched, wondering, uncomprehending, afraid. Her fears were soon justified. Came to her swift and appalling enlightenment. For suddenly, so suddenly that she could not avoid him, he seized her in a savage embrace—an embrace that had in it much of passion and little of the love she coveted. He wrote his character upon her, sign manual of degradation indeed! Shocked beyond measure she came to life on the instant; throbbing, furious, resentful life. She thrust him from her.

That unsteadiness she had before noted and but now understood served him ill. She was young and strong and all the force of her body spurred on by outraged modesty was back of that thrust. He went down as if he had been shot. He had not time even to think why he had been thrust away as he clutched vainly at a little oleander on one of the posts of the balustrade. It did not serve to save him but the tree was dislodged and fell over the railing into the gulf beneath battering along the rocky sides of the cliff and crashing through the silence of the night like a little avalanche.

Stunned as his head struck the stone base of the tower he lay sprawled ignominiously on his back, his arms outflung on the tiles at her feet. She bent over him, hating him, loathing him, beside herself that she had been the unconscious victim of such an affront. And that he had gone down

before a woman's hand added to the contempt in which she held him. There was in her heart a sense of abasement that she had fancied that she loved a man who could thus shamelessly presume upon the preference which she had shown him. Where she had loved she despised. And she made no excuse for him.

Little time was allowed her for reflection for the falling plant and the crash with which Neyland had gone down had startled all on the terrace. Her mother and Rose Tayloe, the Colonel and the Duke and Warburton burst through the shrubbery, while running toward her from every direction came the other guests of the big hotel. She had instantly become the center of a scene, which she hated. The man senseless at her feet had brought it about and for that she was the more bitter against him if possible.

Indeed as she heard the cries and saw friends and strangers alike coming toward her she thought she would have fainted. Her mother screamed and Rose Tayloe burst into a startled exclamation. The Duke muttered something in Italian, instinctively reaching toward the place where his sword usually swung. But it was John Warburton who acted. He usually acted first in a crisis. He shot a swift glance at his ward and then turned to the men.

"I suppose," he said loudly, "that Neyland slipped and fell."

"Yes," answered Chrissey de Selden, forcing herself to speak and making a violent effort to con-

trol her emotions. "We were talking, he leaned against one of those oleander tubs and it fell over."

"Exactly," said Warburton. "Here," he turned to the head waiter who had come up with the others and who understood English well enough, "take Mr. Neyland to his room at once and call a physician. I will come with you. Don't give yourselves any alarm, ladies and gentlemen, I imagine it is nothing more than unconsciousness caused by striking against that stone base there. His head is bleeding but it can't be a concussion. Duke, if you would get these people away and——"

The Duke stepped toward the little circle of people, all Italians, and spoke a few words to them. Courteously they bowed and withdrew while the waiters followed by Warburton carried the unconscious man to the elevator.

"Mother," said Chrissey de Selden, "this has unnerved me. If you will excuse me Rose, and gentlemen all, I think I'll go to my room."

"Certainly," said old Colonel Tayloe. "Come Rose."

"My dear child," said Mrs. de Selden putting her arm around her daughter's waist as the rest of the party save the Duke turned away.

"Pardon, *Signorina*," began Di Attavanti, "it is most inopportune, I know, and yet I am not satisfied. Signor Neyland has insulted you. He was drunk. The terror of the *Signorina*!—if she will allow me I will demand satisfaction."

"No, no," answered the girl, "nothing, I forbid you. Oh, take me away."

The Duke bowed low before her and stepped aside following her with his glance. As she entered the hall he stepped after her, an expression of resolution on his lips. At the elevator they met John Warburton.

"How is he?" asked Mrs. de Selden.

Warburton noticed that the inquiry came from the mother not the daughter. He remarked it with a leap in his heart.

"There happens to be a French physician in the hotel," he answered. "He has examined him and says there is no fracture of the skull. He was just knocked senseless and in fact he is quite conscious now. He'll be all right in the morning."

The Duke waited until mother and daughter had gone to their rooms before he began.

"It is imperative that I see Signor Neyland at once," he said.

"Can't you wait until tomorrow morning?" asked Warburton not in the least suspecting what was in the other's mind.

"Not one minute."

"Well if he wants to see you I guess he can," answered the other turning away. "The yacht will sail for Genoa at ten o'clock tomorrow morning. Be sure and be on board in time, Duke."

"Without fail," said the other bowing and turning toward the elevator.

CHAPTER II

A PASSAGE AT ARMS

JOHN Warburton bade Colonel Tayloe and his daughter good night since no one felt any particular desire for further conversation after this untoward happening. It was late and as he saw no one on the terrace he went around the lift tower to inspect the scene of the accident. He placed himself in the position occupied by his ward, measured distances and closely examined the place left vacant by the fallen oleander. He studied conditions carefully with a deepening frown on his face. The head waiter passing he stopped him.

"Was there much wine drunk at the other end of the table?" asked Warburton.

"A good deal, *Signore*, but not more than gentlemen could carry."

"Umph," said Warburton slipping a hundred lira note into his hand. "You will, of course, say nothing about it. In fact I hope there will be as little discussion of this accident as may be."

"The *Signore* may rely on my discretion," said the man bowing himself away.

Warburton nodded his head, his lips set firmly. He thought he should have something to say to Neyland in the morning. If he had suspected what had really happened he would not have waited until the morning and words alone would have been inadequate. When he called for the wine bill at the office he discovered that there was indeed no extravagance in the quantity that had been served. Neyland could not have been drunk unless—and yet— In short John Warburton did not believe the accident story. Neyland had been thrown backward. Chrissey de Selden had done it, since they were alone. Why? He ascribed her action to an impulsive disgust and contempt at a half-drunken man's action. He never dreamed of the seriousness of the affront. Well was it for Neyland that Warburton did not suspect, yet he knew Neyland's reputation. He would find out the truth in the morning.

John Warburton was a self-contained man long since passed the years of youthful extravagances. He had been compelled to fight his way to the position he occupied against every conceivable odds, and he had learned in the school of hard battling the supreme importance of the sublime virtue of self-restraint and self-control. To careless observation he was as cold-blooded and unemotional a man as ever dominated a mad stock exchange or sought to control the markets of the world. Yet now he did a strange thing. His heart leaped as he thought of what sentiments in

her heart might have caused Chrissey de Selden to thrust Richard Neyland away from her. He bent over and kissed the stone balustrade where her hand had rested a few moments since.

"Pardon," said the Duca di Attavanti to the physician coming out of the door of Neyland's room, "but is the *Signore* in condition to see me?"

"He's perfectly conscious if that is what you mean and has sustained no serious hurt, but I do not believe he will want to see any one, *Monsieur*."

"That I shall ascertain," said the Duke tapping on the door as the doctor went away. One of the attendants of the hotel opened it. "Will you tell Signor Neyland that the Duca di Attavanti desires speech with him?"

Neyland, overhearing the conversation from where he lay on his bed, promptly answered for himself.

"Tell the Duke that I can't see him," he cried.

"Pardon," said the Duke forcing his way past the attendant, "I regret to intrude upon you, *Signore*, but you must see me immediately."

Neyland was lying partially dressed on the bed, his coat and vest having been removed. His head was bandaged. He sat up instantly and stared at his obviously malicious visitor.

"You might have waited until morning," he began with ill concealed hostility. During the past week he had noticed the Duke's attention to Chrissey de Selden and he resented it and disliked the man. "But since you are here please

state your business as briefly as possible. I'll not make any apology for my appearance under the circumstances."

"What passed between you and the Signorina de Selden tonight?"

"What business is it of yours?"

"I have had the honor of asking the Signorina de Selden to become the Duchessa di Attavanti. You are in love with her, that is easy to see——"

"I have made no secret of it. Why should I?"

"You leave the table and follow her. We hear a crash and we find you senseless at her feet and she herself in great agitation, not to say terror. What is the cause of it?"

"She might have been alarmed at the consequences of the accident, might she not?" sneered Neyland rising to his feet and confronting the Duke whom he overtowered by several inches, but the little Italian did not give way at all.

"It was not that. You have insulted her," he said passionately. "Some familiarity—ah," he cried as Neyland's expression showed that the chance shot had hit the mark. "For a bow drawn at a venture that was a good aim."

"You impertinent meddler," roared Neyland, "what I——"

"What you did matters not," interposed the Duke. "The *Signorina* evidently resented it as best she could. I will take up her quarrel now. My seconds shall wait upon you tomorrow morning. My card."

He proffered the bit of pasteboard. Neyland struck it out of his hand.

"Tonight," said the American beside himself with rage staring at the Duke, flushing at this additional insult but quite coolly confronting him. "The moonlight serves. There are doubtless quiet spots in the garden yonder where we shall not be interrupted."

In his senses Neyland would have laughed at the idea of fighting a duel but now he welcomed it. He was overcome with shame. Some of the lingering effects of the wine he had taken were still with him. He had known perfectly well that he could not touch a drop, and ever since he had met Chrissey de Selden he had struggled against that besetting sin successfully and for her sake, only to lose that night all that he had gained. When they had drunk her health he for shame's sake had joined in and after that he had drunk more and more. Why that very Italian had brought it about.

"The *Signore* does not drink the *Signorina's* health?" he had said in surprise as he observed Neyland's empty glass. And although one taste of wine turned him into a brute Neyland had taken up that challenge just as he took up this one.

"As you will," said the Duke, "the sooner the better. Your friend will be?"

Neyland thought quickly. Not Warburton. He sensed a possible rival in John Warburton and hated him although he was his host and had been

his friend. There was old Colonel Tayloe. He was a Virginian and had been a soldier. He mentioned him.

"Captain Zacchei of my regiment will act for me. The two gentlemen can make arrangements," said the Duke.

"I'm ready now."

"And I."

Neyland snatched up a coat, drew a cap over his bandaged head, threw open the door and waved the Duke to proceed. The Captain who had been one of the guests at the dinner and Colonel Tayloe were sitting at one of the small tables smoking before going to bed. Neyland and the Duke drew the two men into one of the deserted rooms off the terrace.

"It's your party," said Neyland to the other. "You speak."

"Signor Neyland and I have fallen into deadly enmity which can only be settled in one way," began the Duke. "I have asked you, *amico mio* to represent me."

"And I want you to see me through this infernal muss, Colonel," said Neyland.

"With the greatest pleasure," answered Zacchei.

"Look here, my boy, this sort of thing is all damn foolishness," said Colonel Tayloe earnestly. "We Americans don't fight duels, and what are you fighting about anyway?"

"We do in this instance," answered Neyland,

"and the cause of our disagreement is—er—the nebular hypothesis. I maintain it and——"

"I dispute it," said the Duke.

"Can't you compose this quarrel gentlemen?" began the Colonel, who was in no wise deceived.

"If Signor Neyland will apologize and leave Sorrento without delay.

"I'll see you damned first," said Neyland.

"More discussion is impossible, gentlemen," said the Duke.

"Pardon, *Signore*," interposed Captain Zacchei, "what is it to be? You are the challenged party."

"I don't understand," answered Neyland.

"Swords or pistols?"

"Swords. I haven't either and I know little about both."

"Mine are at your disposal," said Zacchei.

He summoned the *concierge* upon whose discretion he could rely. A few brief words put him in possession of the situation. Captain Zacchei having gone for his case of swords, the *concierge* fetched the physician who had already treated Neyland and led the five gentlemen to a quiet open spot in the garden surrounded by tall trees and screened from observation by hedges. The place was brightly illuminated by the full moon and the Duke pronounced it entirely suitable. Neyland was in no mood to make objections and Colonel Tayloe could think of none. The two

Americans had a word or two while approaching the place of meeting.

"Colonel," said Neyland, "I acted like a black-guard to night. I wish you would say to—tell her—" He could not bring himself to mention the name—"that I am sorry. That does not express it, but if anything happens to me——"

"Do you know anything about sword play?" asked the Colonel who had been an accomplished fencer at West Point.

"I belong to the New York Fencing Club but I haven't had a foil in my hand in years. I don't care a rap if he kills me after——"

There was no time for anything further. The engagement was brief. Neyland attacked instantly the word was given, awkwardly, unskillfully, impetuously. The Duke contented himself with parrying in order to feel out his adversary and perhaps to tire him. He soon discovered that he was confronted by a mere tyro at fencing and with the knowledge that he was a past master of the sword he realized that he could end it how and whenever he wished. He was careless enough to laugh at one particularly futile lunge and that laugh was his undoing. The enraged American hurled himself upon him, beat down his guard by main strength in a way utterly unsanctioned by the schools, and drove his sword almost to the hilt through the Duke's shoulder. Neyland stood staring at him in horrified surprise as the Italian fell, blood gushing over his white shirt.

It was John Warburton who broke in again. He had been idly wandering through the garden smoking after he left the terrace, his mind too full of fascinating possibilities to go to bed, when he had heard the clash of steel and turning had seen the flashes of light on the swift moving swords through the trees and shrubbery. Naturally he went toward the sound. He arrived just in time to see the Duke fall and to hear Neyland say to the Colonel.

"This is a pretty night's work. I have insulted a woman and half killed a man in the space of half an hour."

"I did not mean to observe. I only came here by chance and I certainly did not mean to overhear," broke in Warburton. "I suspected the first part of your confession, Neyland, and I see the evidence of the latter part. You will, I am sure, see that I can no longer count you as one of my guests on the *Christianna*."

"I've made a mess of it all round," said Neyland harshly. "I don't blame you, Warburton. I'd like a chance to apologize, but this disagreement about the—er—nebular hypothesis with the Duke yonder and his condition——"

"It is most serious, gentlemen," said the doctor. "I advise *Monsieur* to leave Sorrento at once."

"It was a fair fight, wasn't it?" snapped out Neyland.

"I can testify to that," answered Captain Zacchei magnanimously.

"By gad, sirs, so can I," answered the Colonel.

"But under the circumstances it would be well if Signor Neyland leaves with the yacht, which I understand steams in the morning," continued Zacchei, who had not heard Warburton's statement, being busied with the Duke, who was sorely hurt and very faint from loss of blood.

"I will go tonight," said Neyland. "Warburton, will you make what excuses you can for me to the rest of your party and have my man take my things off at Genoa and go to the Grand Hotel and wait me there?"

"I will."

"And Warburton, I seem to have abused your hospitality outrageously. I can't explain it but I hope you won't be too hard on me in any comments you may desire to make."

"I shall make no comments at all," said Warburton coldly. "I shall only say that you were called away imperatively and left your apologies with me."

"I suppose this thing can be hushed up."

"We are all men of honour here, Signor Neyland," said Captain Zacchei, "and the *concierge*——"

"I am a man of honour too, *Signori*," said the *concierge*, gallantly pocketing a bundle of notes which Warburton thrust into his hand, and turning away to summon further assistance for the Duke.

"This is a bad business," said the Colonel, following him with Neyland.

"Yes, I have lost out where I most cared. Well, I brought it on myself," said Neyland bitterly.

Chrissey de Selden did not come down to breakfast the next morning; in fact she did not appear at all until time to embark on the yacht. She received John Warburton's explanation about the failure of the Duke and Neyland to present themselves at the landing stage with apathy. She had heard nothing, it appeared. Just as they were embarking on the launch a note was put into her hand.

"*Ma donna*," it ran, "I did my best to avenge the insult but fortune was against me for I have been wounded by that blunderer's sword."

The girl stared at the note, the handwriting being that of a stranger since the Duke had been forced to employ an amanuensis. She stepped to the deserted end of the wharf for privacy, taking Warburton with her. She thrust the note before him.

"I hadn't meant to tell you," said Warburton, glancing at it and seeing no way out of it, "but Neyland and the Duke had an encounter last night with swords."

"About me?" asked the girl.

"About the nebular hypothesis, they said."

"And was he—did he——?"

"Although the Duke is an accomplished swordsman, in some strange way Neyland ran him through the shoulder. His condition is serious."

"And Mr. Neyland?"

"Escaped without a scratch."

"I wish the Duke had killed him," said the girl suddenly.

"Why?" asked Warburton. "But you must not answer of course," he went on hurriedly, "I have no right to ask."

"And that is why neither of them sails with us?"

"Yes."

Chrissey de Selden carried a great bunch of red roses that Warburton had given her that morning.

"You won't mind," she asked detaching one and handing it to the messenger as they came back to the launch. "Give this to your master," she continued, "and tell him I am very sorry that he is hurt. Now take me to the yacht quickly," she said to Warburton. "I don't believe I can stand any more."

She swayed almost as if she would fall. Warburton put his arm around her as he had often done when she was a child, and half lifted her into the launch whither the others had preceded her. Colonel Tayloe, who alone had the clue to everything that had happened, discreetly engaged his daughter and Mrs. de Selden in conversation.

"I'm going to my cabin," said the girl as Warburton helped her through the gangway.

"Before you go," said the man—and there was a meaning in his words and a look which she had never seen before and which startled her—"I want to tell you now that I am, as indeed I always have

been, absolutely devoted to you and your service—Christianna.”

There was a long pause between the assurance and the name which he had been accustomed to use in earlier days, but which had fallen rarely from his lips since she had grown up. The girl stared at him in surprise.

“I know,” she said at last.

There was something so strong and so powerful about John Warburton that no woman could be indifferent to such an assurance, and Chrissey de Selden was in the exact mood to receive it gratefully.

CHAPTER III

ONE WAY OUT

JOHN WARBURTON and Chrissey de Selden stood on the windward end of the lower flying bridge of the *Acquitania*. The great ship was moving slowly up the channel toward its pier. They were staring ahead in the pleasant fall weather at the wonderful sky line of New York, a sky line no one could look at without emotion and which never failed to impress the American with a sense of the material wealth and splendour and greatness of the land he called his own.

It was a case of *similia similibus* for Warburton was the very incarnation of material power. His was the greatest name, in finance at least, in America, and he looked it. But other things appealed to him, beauty most of all. He was a collector of the rich, the rare, the exquisite, a discriminating collector, not one who bought up what other men had assembled but who exercised his own taste and developed it. Indeed, he rejoiced in the possession of the material because with it he could achieve the beautiful,—that is, with certain limitations.

Could he ever achieve Chrissey de Selden, for instance, who stood by his side gazing ahead at the great Gothic tower of the Woolworth building, contrasting it with the pretentious and bizarre effect of the Singer spire, and turning from both to the pyramidal top of the Banker's Trust building with a thin column of smoke rising in the still air, like an Aztec Teocalli with the burnt sacrifice smouldering on its top.

Chrissey de Selden was certainly fair to look upon. Entrancing, impressive, as was the sky line to John Warburton—and it had never lost the freshness of its appeal although he had seen it many times from incoming ships—he turned from it to stare at her. She was a small woman, out of fashion by that, perhaps, but perfectly made and of such exquisite proportion that the fraction of an inch added to her height would have spoiled her, as the breadth of a line on the nose of Egypt might have thrown Cleopatra into oblivion. She was pale of face, her pallor intensified by the shadows of her soft brown hair, which, being beautifully browed like *Cenone*, she wore brushed straight back from a point on her forehead and drawn down around her oval face, which it framed in a dusky aureole. And her eyes were brown, sometimes shot with lambent fires, again veiled in misty softness, or sparkling blackly with merriment, according to her mood. The clear pallor of her cheek was sometimes touched with colour and it always radiated health and sweetness and light. Her nose was

perfectly modelled, albeit just a trifle too large for absolute perfection, as if to bring her within the range of common human thought and life by leaving something to be desired. John Warburton was critical. He had examined covertly, as this morning, and analysed inwardly as he always did, that face many a time. Perhaps that red-lipped mouth so gracefully curved was a trifle too large also, but it was so kissable.

They stood on the high bridge staring at the sky line, the people on the decks below envying them their vantage point, which Warburton's influence had procured. And the man wanted to take the woman in his arms before them all. He craved to lift her up to his own height and press her to his breast so that her heart should beat against his. He had begun to love her when her father had given her, a slip of a girl, to him, and had charged him on his honour and by his manhood to deal righteously with her and the not inconsiderable fortune committed to his trust with the mother and daughter. And Warburton had been faithful to that trust. None could gainsay that. In his successful operations the de Seldens had shared. Even in America, where Warburton's fortune was colossal, they were regarded as extremely wealthy.

Chrissey de Selden—Christianna he had always called her in formal, old-fashioned courtesy—had never lacked anything. If she had been as poor as Warburton had once been he would never have allowed her to ask a second time for any-

thing, and he would have anticipated her slightest wish.

Mrs. de Selden had lived in retirement after her husband's death, chiefly engaged in superintending her daughter's education. Warburton had only seen them occasionally until the daughter had been launched in society under such brilliant auspices and such favourable conditions as fall to the lot of few *débutantes*. For her sake Warburton had built himself a palace on Fifth Avenue and at his earnest request Miss de Selden and her mother had come there to live and preside over his magnificent hospitality.

From the day he had seen her as a woman Warburton had loved her. Twice her age, he had made no effort to apprise her of his passion. He had been convinced that he was not meant for her, and there were other reasons beside the disparity in years which moved him to this conclusion. So, with that iron self-repression which made him terribly feared in the modern warfare where bullets are dollars and the flash of wit takes the place of steel, with a pain in his heart he could not subdue he had stood aside and watched other men advance where he hesitated.

He had played many a waiting game in his life, conscious that things do come to him who waits, provided he can control the course. The waiting game had been hopeless at first but finally as suitor after suitor made his attack, failed and gave over the chase, or stood helplessly afar off, all War-

burton's spirits rose and he began to dream. Dreams of the strong sometimes are translated into action and become realities. Warburton had been about ready to speak when Neyland crossed his path, or rather hers.

Richard Neyland was rich, well born, distinguished, young. He had taken his fling. He had barely got through Harvard and he had gone abroad thereafter. The heat in his blood had flung him into all sorts of adventures. He had fought as a volunteer under Savoff in Bulgaria, had hunted big game in equatorial Africa, followed a wandering northman into the Arctic seas, and now he was back in New York with all the glamour of these pursuits about him.

He had inherited a seat on the stock exchange but with a fortune sufficient to his needs had made little use of it. He had never committed the crime of aiming low and so soon as he had met Chrissey de Selden he had aimed for her. After all that excitement of fighting and exploring humdrum life had not suited him. There were wild tales of his excesses current in the society to which he belonged, and not concealed from the public generally, which loved such gossip and rejoiced in base innuendo. Some had even delved into his ancestry and discovered—well, what they discovered was of no moment to Chrissey de Selden.

Warburton, who knew Neyland's whole history and the tainted blood which had been handed down to him, did not at first feel it necessary to dis-

close it to his young ward. Yet his position was a difficult one. He knew that he must speak sooner or later. Watching the course of events acutely, he sometimes doubted if it were not already too late. For the first and only time in his life had he been undecided.

At Chrissey de Selden's direct request he had invited Neyland to be one of that party on the great and gorgeous yacht he had purchased and named for her. The episode at the Hotel Victoria at Sorrento had shown him that he had been right in his estimate of Neyland and it had persuaded him also that there was still time for him to speak if he wished. With rare and exquisite tact he had never mentioned Neyland or the Duca di Attavanti in the months of wandering around the Mediterranean after leaving Naples, and for that very reason Chrissey de Selden, who had wanted above all things to talk about them, was disappointed.

Once or twice she had started to confide in Warburton—she had of course told her mother and Rose Tayloe all about it—but Warburton would not discuss it. He had never passed any censure on Neyland either. It was not his habit to talk about a man behind his back, nor, strange as it may seem in such a fighter on the stock exchange, to hit a man when he was down. Indeed many a man could tell tales of helping hands extended him through Warburton's influence. To be sure this was generally after Warburton had got what he

wanted out of the man who had presumed to question his rule. And this, albeit he did not so intend it, had turned to Warburton's advantage.

That virtual offer of himself which he had made to Chrissey de Selden that morning on the yacht had remained ever present with the girl. She had turned it over and over in her mind. There was something fascinating in the idea that this great man who, it was sometimes urged, held the destinies of America in his hand, was hers for the taking. She had studied Warburton physically of late but there was not a single thing about him that could be called handsome or appealing except his strength and power. That was written in every line of his face and in every part of his body. He was a big man mentally and physically, and he looked it. Neyland was an Adonis beside him, and even the little Duke, *point-device* in everything, far surpassed him in outward and visible attractiveness.

Chrissey de Selden had not passed two years in the whirl of society without learning to estimate mankind and she made these two comparisons, strange to say, not to Warburton's disadvantage. He was so cold, so reserved, so self-contained, so masterful and fixed, and withal so much older than she that she could not bring herself to think of him as a lover, much less a husband. And yet to her mind would recur that declaration. It was supplemented by little attentions which, lacking a key or clue before, she had accepted as a matter of

course, only now realizing in them an exquisite thoughtfulness and devotion.

Tired at last of aimless travel and longing for home, they had turned the yacht over to her sailing master to make the best of her way to New York, and had taken passage on the *Acquitania*. Fortune, who shuffles the cards and brings different suits and values into strange juxtaposition as she plays her never-ending game of solitaire with humanity, had so arranged matters that Neyland, who had wandered through Europe striving to forget and to show himself worthy of the affection she had once had for him by keeping sober again, had taken passage homeward on the same ship; and the company of the elect had been further increased by the Duca di Attavanti, who had secured leave of absence to go to the United States and prosecute his campaign for the heart of the fair little American during his convalescence.

To do him justice the Duke was not a fortune hunter. His possessions, while they did not match with the great fortunes of America, were ample to enable him to support a wife in accordance with the demands of that station, high and honourable, into which it had pleased God to call him. Miss de Selden's money was the last thing he thought of.

The situation was unpleasant. There was no reason why Neyland and the Tayloes—Colonel Tayloe had known Neyland's father and loved him—should not be friends, and there was no reason

why the Duke should not pay his court openly. Indeed he did it. But there was bad blood between the American and the Italian, and Chrissey de Selden, unforgetful, had passed Neyland by as an idle wind which she respected not. Warburton had been coolly polite to him but Neyland had taken to haunting the smoking-room, avoiding them all. He smoked much, he played high, but as yet he drank nothing.

That any one should refuse him never entered the head of Attavanti. He fell into the view that Miss de Selden was under obligation to him, that he had constituted himself her champion at her request, or at least with her sanction; that red rose had seemed to him to typify her acceptance of the red blood he had shed on her behalf. It was becoming increasingly difficult for Chrissey de Selden to keep the Duke at arm's length and it was becoming more and more difficult for her to maintain that pitch of passionate indignation and resentment against Neyland. Some hint of the affair had leaked out in some way in ship gossip. She was an object of deep interest to the less favoured passengers not honoured with her acquaintance.

One could be as exclusive on the *Acquitania* if one had money and desired it as in one's own home, and although she was the last person to realize that interest, when she did it burst upon her that the papers would get hold of it, that everybody would know that she had been fought about in

Italy, and that endless gossip and scandal would make her a by-word in that section of society which loves to throw mud at those who sit in the seats of the mighty, and which would fain follow Biblical precedent by pulling them down and casting them out.

A woman of splendid pride was Chrissey de Selden and she raged against that possibility, wondering how she could avoid it, and as she was an unusually clear-sighted woman, she presently realized that there was a way and that way was Warburton.

Perhaps that thought made her a little kinder than she would ordinarily have been toward the man she so respected and regarded, although not at all in the way he wished. Perhaps to show the Duke that a greater than he was hers for the taking, perhaps to convince herself, and incidentally Neyland, how thoroughly the latter had passed out of her life, she had been complaisant, receptive. Therefore, she was not at all surprised when John Warburton laid his hand on hers lying on the rail and said to her in his formal and somewhat precise way:

"Christianna"—why could he never call her Chrissey or Chris?—"it is a presumption on my part which you cannot realize more clearly than I. By age and temperament and everything but the material things in life, which after all count for little"—it is those who have much who think little of what they have!—"surely I am utterly

unsuited to and unfit for you but I love you and I offer myself to you. If you will be my wife I will try to make you the happiest of women."

And before she answered she noted with a little pained amusement the unselfish conclusion of his proposal. Why did he not say, for instance, that her acceptance would make him the happiest of men? But that was John Warburton's way.

CHAPTER IV

BAFFLED SUITORS

SAVE for that touch of his big, strong hand upon hers, his manner was exactly what it would have been if he had been offering to buy a Raphael or another railroad. Stop, there was this difference. A Raphael or a railroad would have been ordered in terms which clearly indicated his intention of getting it. There was a suggestion of dubiety in his humility, albeit that humility was as restrained and as cold as the rest of him, but the note was there.

Well for Warburton that it was, for it was the only thing that really touched the woman's heart. Having said his say he waited. He was afraid. Chrissey de Selden leaned over the rail and looked down at the deck beneath. Neyland, his face flushed, his air moody and sullen, leaned against the rail forward, his back turned to America and New York while he shot covert glances at the two from under the peak of his cap. The little Duke walked back and forth across the deck athwartship with Rose Tayloe. He twitched his mustaches and smiled up at her with an air singu-

larly like that of a proprietor. He might have had Rose Tayloe for the asking and she was worth asking for, too, but although he gave her outward and visible attention, his inward thoughts were for the woman above him. Her latest suitors were before her. Which should she take?

They were slowly swinging up the North River now. There were others on shore who would be waiting for her. Some of them expectant of answers, some of them hopeful, all of them pursuing and not faint about it either. There was the set in which she lived eager to welcome her with open arms. There would be the newspaper reporters from the gossip society sheets to the yellow journals.

Here by her side was John Warburton—waiting. He was a refuge, a haven. She forgot for the moment what matrimony meant. She did not realize the fierce passions that filled the man under that steady impassive front. It did not occur to her that a great fighter is apt to make a great lover.

She would stop the annoying attentions of the Duke. She would show Richard Neyland that she had meant all that had been expressed in that furious thrust that had laid him low. She would stop silly gossip with the announcement of her engagement. There would be no great romance in marrying John Warburton. People would lose interest in her so soon as her engagement was known, she thought mistakenly.

She liked him very much. He had always been kind to her. She turned and studied his impassive face a little.

"Yes," she said in a manner as quiet as his own, "I will marry you."

She was still looking at him, and although he strove to retain that immobility for which he was famous she was conscious of a swift momentary change of his expression, the tremendous rise of his broad chest, as it were with a gasp, and the steady flood of colour that came into his bronzed cheek. How she had touched him! This might have warned her that marriage even with John Warburton was not to be regarded as a mere business enterprise but that it involved other things quite different.

But all this was momentary. It was the same John Warburton she had always known who stood there. Characteristically he removed his hand from hers before he spoke.

"Thank you, you shall not regret this decision."

John Warburton was so accustomed to the dominance of his own will that it never occurred to him that it was not always man who disposes as well as proposes. Being a man of direct habit and thought, he went straight to the next question.

"When shall we be married?"

"This is the middle of September," answered the girl. "It will take me six weeks or so to get ready——"

"Shall we say the last of October?"

"That will suit me very well. Now this being all settled," she continued, smiling at him a little pitifully—was it because she had taken the step and there would be no more gay passages at arms with men, or because of the little Duke's certain resentment or because of Richard Neyland, or because the whole thing was so unromantic and matter-of-fact that she was conscious of a deep feeling of disappointment?—"I must go below. Good-bye. I'll see you on the dock, of course."

Neyland saw her leave the bridge. He so timed his own progress toward the cabin as to meet her in one of the narrow gangways. He deliberately blocked her way.

"Miss de Selden," he began formally and she noted with a pang of pity how thoroughly haggard and worn and miserable he looked and how broken. Her eyes misted although she would fain have had them blaze.

"Let me pass," she said with a fierceness that belied her gaze.

"For God's sake," he said, and by that plea he meant for his sake and hers although she did not know it, "give me a moment."

"I'm afraid," she answered cuttingly, although there was no fear in her heart, "to be alone with you after the last time at Sorrento."

"I was mad then," said the man eagerly. "I want to ask your for——"

"If you have anything to ask," the girl went on mercilessly, "I shall have to refer you to Mr.

Warburton, to whom I am to be married in October."

"It isn't true! It can't be!"

"Will you let me pass now, Mr. Neyland?" she continued, and as he shrank back she swept by him her head in air, her heart beating, her cheeks flushed.

It was a sweet revenge almost worth her pledge to John Warburton.

Hurrying along the corridor came the Duke who had torn himself away from Rose Tayloe and had sought speech with Chrissey de Selden so soon as he, too, saw her leave the bridge. He saw her enter her cabin and then he stopped in front of Neyland. The latter looked down at him and laughed mirthlessly, mockingly.

"You laugh, *Signore*," said the Duke fiercely, "there is mockery, you were speaking to the Signorina de Selden. I forbid it."

"You forbid it!" sneered Neyland.

"Yes, I. By blundering clumsiness you ran me through once, but the next time——"

"This is America. There won't be any next time. And let me tell you, you would better go back to Italy and stop your futile pursuit of that young lady."

"And why?"

"I've just been congratulating her on her approaching marriage to John Warburton."

"You lie," said the little Italian springing forward, but Neyland caught his arm and shoved him

along the gangway to one of the broad pleasure rooms. They saw John Warburton descending from the bridge above.

"You fool," said Neyland letting the Italian loose, "there's Warburton, ask him."

Most of the passengers were on deck and the three men had the apartment to themselves. Neyland started to go out, thought better of it, and stopped.

"I congratulate you," he said to Warburton as the Italian adjusted his ruffled apparel.

"On what?"

"On your engagement to Miss de Selden. I suppose you filled her up with lies about me, damn you."

"I have not so much as mentioned your name to her," was the contemptuous reply. "I have even refused to listen when she has sought to talk about you."

"Is it so indeed?" sneered Neyland. "Well, you think you have done with me but you haven't. I've been a fool but you'll know before I get through that there's another side to my character."

"I wish you good luck in your endeavours. You'll need all that you can get."

Warburton smiled grimly at him. Neyland ground his heel into the deck and turned away. It was the Duke who stepped into the breach. Waiting until the other had departed, he began:

"I consider the Signorina de Selden belongs to me. I have fought for her. I am of the oldest

blood in Italy, an officer of the First Bersaglieri. I have riches, youth. I appeal to you as her guardian for her hand. I would make her the Duchessa di Attavanti."

"But she does not love you."

"I think yes."

"She has just promised to marry me."

"It is monstrous. I forbid it. I intend to marry her. You are her guardian."

"She is of age, and settles these matters herself."

"She has encouraged me. She has permitted me to hope, to——"

Warburton's hand fell heavily on the Duke's shoulder.

"You have said that once to me. I wouldn't say it again to anybody else."

"Why?"

"It's not true."

"You give me the lie! Me, a soldier of Italy?"

"I give you a chance to get away with your life."

"Oh, you would fight me?"

"We don't fight duels in America, and I haven't the slightest intention of doing anything so foolish as that."

"I will make you fight," said the Duke wrenching himself away from Warburton and suddenly raising his hand threateningly.

"I wouldn't advise you to do that," said the big American quietly.

"Why not?"

"I'll give you the worst thrashing you ever had in your life."

"I will brand you as a coward."

"There are too many people in America who know the truth to make that threat of any consequence to me whatever."

The Duke was helpless but he began:

"I love her so."

He was as brave a man as ever lived, but there could not have been a greater contrast between two men than between these two. He leaned his head against a bookcase, his eyes filled with tears.

"I'm sorry for you," said Warburton more kindly. "I believe you are a brave and gallant gentleman. Miss de Selden admires and respects you, I know, but she is going to marry me and that is all there is to it."

"But does she love you?"

"I think we would better stop this conversation," said Warburton quietly, "I have treated you better than you deserve, but I feel sorry for you." It was rare indeed that Warburton expressed pity for any one in this way. "I do not know what your plans are," he continued, "but I shall be glad to do anything I can to make your stay in America a pleasant one, and if you can forget this little episode I should be glad to welcome you at my house, which is Miss de Selden's house now and which will be her house after our marriage."

"I cannot look upon her and think of her as

belonging to another," said the little Duke turning away with his head high.

Yet all the honours of the interview did not belong to Warburton. One question the Duke had asked stuck in his mind. Did she love him? What a fool he had been. He had never asked her and she had not said. He turned toward the cabin *de luxe* she occupied intent to settle that question. Before her door he paused with uplifted hand, but he did not knock upon it. There are some questions better not asked, perhaps. He might not get the answer that he should.

"Well," he said to himself as many another man had done, "I will get an answer some day."

He was confident as to what that answer would be. Indeed, there could be no other.

CHAPTER V

THE WOMAN ON THE STAIR

It was characteristic of the situation that Chrissey de Selden did not tell her mother about her engagement so soon as she saw her. It was not until the landing had been effected, the tiresome customs inspections gone through with, and the party had reached home, John Warburton's great house on upper Fifth Avenue, that Mrs. de Selden heard the news and then it came through Warburton himself.

He waited until evening. Leaving them at the house he had immediately gone down to his office and had returned just in time to dress for dinner. He was surprised when he discovered that Chrissey de Selden had said nothing. It was not because she had no love for her mother or did not value her judgment or did not make a confidante of her in such matters and in all matters as a daughter should, but because of the nature of the engagement itself, the reasons which had actuated her, the complications preceding. It did not yet seem quite real to the girl. There ought to be some other ratification of so important an undertaking than a mere verbal one. She was not quite sure of herself.

She could not determine whether she had acted wisely or not and as long as it was simply between Warburton and herself there was no actuality to it. He had not kissed her. He had not made the least advance except to touch her hand on the rail. She looked at her hand curiously as she dressed for dinner and wondered whether she was glad or resentful over his coldness.

She had kissed John Warburton many times as her guardian but she had never let him kiss her, nor had he ever attempted to do so, in any other way. There was great relief to her mind in that fact. She wondered if he would continue that course. She hoped so, although she did not dwell very greatly upon that proposition or that phase of it. It was yet too unreal.

Of course the engagement would have to be made public. In fact, the sooner it was told the better, and she had really become engaged to him that it might be told and that she might have his protection from other suitors and from gossip and scandal and unpleasant talk. Yet she shrank from the telling as one who must take a plunge realizes the chill of the water and stands shivering and reluctant in the warm air, fearful of the leap. Nor was there any reason for her reticence. The telephone had rung half an hour before and when she had answered it Rose Tayloe had overwhelmed her with surprise and congratulations.

"How did you know it?" asked Chrissey.

"The poor Duke told me. He is awfully cut

up about it," was the answer. "He has been at our house all afternoon and——"

"I think you can mend that cut," Chrissey had laughed back in reply. "No, it hasn't been announced yet and no one knows it except you two."

"One other man knows it."

"Who is that?"

"Richard Neyland."

"Of course," said Chrissey indifferently although her heart beat faster at that remembrance. "Well, it doesn't make any difference. Everybody will know it in a short time."

"I'll be over tomorrow morning," said Rose before she hung up the receiver, "and you can tell me all about it. I never dreamed of such a thing. It will be the greatest surprise to everybody, I'm sure."

So that was the way they looked at it, thought the woman. A great surprise, a subject for vast congratulations! And the Duke knew of it as well as Neyland. She was glad that the little Duke had heard of it so soon, and she wondered how they both would take it. Rose would know. She found herself looking forward eagerly to the interview in the morning.

And so she dawdled over her dressing, showed herself capricious, changeable, undecided. Her maid found her hard to please. Her mother had no reason for delay and Chrissey's dilatoriness gave the elder woman a few minutes in the drawing-room with Warburton.

"I suppose," the man began, "that Christianna has told you?"

"Told me what?"

"About her engagement."

"She has said nothing. An engagement to do what?"

"To get married."

"To whom?"

"To me."

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. de Selden in great surprise.

"It surprises you, I know. It also surprises me. Indeed I can scarcely realize it myself."

"But when, how, where?"

"On the ship this morning, coming up the bay, I asked her to be my wife."

"But do you love her? I mean in that way. I know, of course, in other ways."

"I believe," answered Warburton quietly, "that I have loved her in that way, as you say, ever since she made her *début*."

"Why didn't you speak?"

"It seemed to me to be hopeless and not to be kind. Youth calls to youth. I stood back and waited, but no one else seemed to attract her sufficiently and so this morning I staked everything on an appeal."

Mrs. de Selden looked at the man with growing admiration. Whatever Warburton did he did thoroughly. Half-way measures did not appeal to him and he never employed them. She had

known him since he was a baby. Although she was not old enough to be his mother she was still much older than he, and she had in some sense acted a mother's part toward him. No one knew him better than she and no one could appreciate the tremendous quality of his self-restraint, indicated by that simple statement that he had waited and given the rest of the world a chance at that great prize he would fain have won for himself. And how great was the prize Mrs. de Selden also knew.

Warburton's simple statement that he loved her daughter meant more than a thousand protestations from a weaker man.

"I thought that Richard Neyland—" she began after a little silence.

"I thought so too, but what happened on the terrace at the Victoria seems to have broken that off."

"You know what happened?"

"No, I never asked Christianna. I even stopped her when I thought she intended to tell. Whatever it was, he was terribly punished for it."

"You mean in losing her?"

"Yes, she refused even to speak to him on the ship."

"But does she love you?" asked the woman suddenly.

"I didn't ask her?"

"What?"

"And she didn't say. What do you think about it?"

"I don't know. Not exactly as a husband. She is very fond of you in other ways, you have been so good to her and to me."

Warburton nodded in grave acquiescence.

"I will wait for the rest," he said. "I am used to waiting."

"There is no man on earth I would rather give my daughter to, than to you, John," said the woman dropping into the familiar address of earlier days, "but you know—" She paused, not willing to hurt him.

"You mean that I must tell her?"

"Of course."

"I had intended to do so before the matter went any further, before any public announcement was made, and I shall do so tonight. Ah," he turned his head, "I hear her footstep on the stairs."

"Shall you tell her now?"

"Immediately."

"Shall I leave you alone?"

"By no means. You are the evidence in the case and necessary to the story."

"Very well," said Mrs. de Selden, who was not without a natural and womanly curiosity over the forthcoming interview and its further developments. "I'm sorry that you have to tell such a story. I'm sorry that there is such a story, but Chrissey must know."

"Of course," said Warburton. "I cannot marry her under a false pretence, and although no one knows but you and I, it would certainly come out some day. I am sure that I cannot afford to neglect any possibility of happiness. Perhaps it is going to be hard enough for me to secure it for her, to say nothing of myself, as it is."

Warburton never spoke a truer word. Accustomed as he was to overcoming great obstacles, facing fearful odds and dominating all situations, no task to which he could apply himself would ever bulk as large as this one, or call into action qualities which the very strength of the man made it more difficult for him to employ. He might well have quailed if he had known, as he turned to the hall to go to meet the woman coming slowly down the stair.

Now there is no device which sets off a beautiful woman better than a flight of stairs provided she knows how to descend them. This was a noble flight, for the architect having plenty of money and plenty of room, even on upper Fifth Avenue, had made the great stair the finest feature of the house.

Chrissey de Selden was a small woman, considerably under the average feminine height, which seems constantly to grow greater, but she fitted those stairs perfectly. By what reasons actuated she had not stopped to find out, she had at last put on her most beautiful gown, a Parisienne confection of extraordinary elegance, the soft and

delicate colour of which became her as a consummate artist's background a portrait.

She was coming down slowly, pausing as if reluctant upon each broad tread, her outstretched foot, dainty to distraction, halted in air a second over each riser as if loath for the descent. Warburton, appearing immensely strong and stern and self-repressed but with unwonted light in his eyes, stood at the foot and looked up toward her. He thought, half-whimsically, that if he had consulted his inclination he would have taken the intervening steps in a few bounds to catch her in his arms, to clasp her to his breast and almost kiss her life away, but he was too long used to repression for any such impulsive action. He was not at all sure of her. A strange shyness had possessed him in her presence. So he only waited, erect, grave, to outward intents and purposes cool and composed although his heart was beating like a trip hammer.

The lights were low in the hall and softly shaded, the radiation indirect. It seemed to Warburton that little Chrissey de Selden was fairly floating toward him. He had something of the feeling of a man confronted by an angel. Yet he could have played Jacob on that occasion without difficulty. Chrissey de Selden had moved abstractedly upon the stair, her thoughts quite elsewhere until she caught sight of Warburton coming through the door. For a moment her heart stood still. It was no lover-like

wave of emotion that caused it to resume its beat.

This was the first time she had seen him alone—there was no one else in the hall, she could not see her mother in the drawing-room—since he had proposed to her. She had accepted him. She had promised to be his wife. It would be no liberty on his part if he presumed upon that engagement to take her in his arms, to kiss her with a passion that she had sensed vaguely in spite of his repression, yet which left her strangely cold and indifferent; yes, more than indifferent, slightly antagonistic, repugnant being too harsh a word just then.

He looked so powerful and so masterful that a little fear overcame her. To what had she too impulsively pledged herself? What obligations had she so suddenly assumed? And he was thinking of what he had to tell her and wondering if it would make any difference. And because he was so in love with her John the fearless was afraid.

CHAPTER VI

THE REVELATION

CHRISSEY DE SELDEN had held her head high, and in an age when familiarity was current coin she had allowed none of it to be passed upon her. Her flirtations had stopped far short of the ordinary, much more the extraordinary, limits of her set and acquaintance. She was virgin in body as well as soul; not even a kiss, no other caress. Stop! She crimsoned as she recalled Neyland. Swiftly she found herself asking was it altogether shame or— Ah, it was a strange mood in which to descend a stair toward a lover waiting at the foot.

However else she might typify varying woman, she was no coward; so, after the first momentary hesitation, she came steadily on, but with each descending step her apprehension mounted and it was by sheer nervous force and will that she at last reached her lover's side. There was a look in his eyes that she had never seen, so swiftly had he progressed since the morning. As before she put out her hand. The bare and beautiful outstretched arm, the dainty hand held before him, seemed to

recall Warburton to himself. He had bent toward her as she stepped to the floor but now he straightened up in a slightly awkward, yet curiously impressive, way. Then he took her hand and lifting it up he kissed it.

That she had escaped was her first feeling. There was that in the pressure of his lips upon her hand that told her from what she escaped and warned her that she could not always hope for immunity in the future. That promise of marriage suddenly bulked large before her vision. Warburton's words were commonplace enough. For that matter he had proposed to her in a commonplace way.

"Christianna," he began—she had never liked the name and she liked it less than ever then. If he would only call her Chrissey or Chris like—"I have something important to say to you before our engagement is announced, after which it may well be that you won't care to pursue it further."

The leap of her heart in her bosom should have warned her. There was a chance! The way of retreat was open. Richard Neyland might still—She stiffened herself visibly. He could see and, as might be expected, he misinterpreted it. He dropped her hand and pointed toward the door. Her words reassured him.

"I can think of nothing which would make me withdraw or——"

"Regret?" he interposed passing into the room.

"Mother," she began as she saw Mrs. de Selden, "I am—I have—Mr. Warburton——"

She who was usually fluent, faltered, stopped. Her mother rose and came toward her and put her arm about her wondering at her hesitancy.

"I know," she said, "John told me."

"John," said the girl vaguely. She had never in all her life thought of him by that name. Would she have to call him John, when—after—? "You have something to say to me?" she began, looking at him.

"I offered to withdraw and let him say it alone," said her mother.

"I asked her to remain."

"Of course," said the girl. "What could you have to say to me that my mother could not hear?"

Now had it been any other man than Warburton she might have found many reasons for a desire on his part for speech alone with her, and Warburton was quick enough to notice, but as usual he gave no sign.

"Won't you sit down?" he asked as he walked to the mantelpiece and stood. He liked to face difficult situations standing. "You are familiar with my career since your father's death and since he made me executor of his will and guardian of his daughter."

"Of course."

"You know also from what a splendid line you have sprung both on your mother's side and on your father's," he went on, smiling slightly as the

girl bowed, wondering to what this might tend. "On that score as on every other I am no match for you. I said that when I asked you to be my wife."

"Yes, but I did not credit that, Mr. Warburton."

"And that is not my name."

"Not your name! I don't understand."

"Your father gave it to me and I have, I trust, borne it with dignity and honour."

"Certainly that," said Mrs. de Selden.

"But as your mother very well knows I have no claim to it."

"What is your name?" burst out the girl.

"I do not know."

"Mystery upon mystery. Will you please explain directly?"

"Certainly. Before your father married he lived in a big house overlooking the Hudson River on Warburton Avenue, Yonkers. It was sold some years since and torn down to make way for real estate developments."

"I remember it perfectly."

"Coming home from the theatre one winter night his coachman stopped his horses just inside the lodge gate. There was a bundle in a basket lying by the road-side. Philip de Selden got out to investigate. As he drew near he heard a cry. There was life in the bundle. He picked it up and drove to the house, took it within, and called his mother. They unwrapped it and discovered a baby."

"Was it you?"

"So I have been told."

"Was there nothing to identify it?"

"Not a thing. The baby was poorly dressed. There were no marks on its body or clothes, no jewelry of any sort. The things which always appear in stories of foundlings by which in after years their parentage is discovered were not there. There was absolutely no clue of any kind. I do not know who my parents were or why one of them or both of them left me there and I never shall know. Personally I care little for ancestors. I judge men, I estimate them, by their merits alone. Family means nothing to me, not even yours in that way. I should never have loved you for your ancestry but for your self."

"And you say there was nothing?"

"One thing you forgot, John," said Mrs. de Selden. "We do know this. Your father has often told me the story, my dear. The day after they found you the body of a woman was taken out of the river. She had been in the water but a few hours. She was young, good-looking, well-bred, I am told, but she was poor. Her clothing was threadbare and without a mark."

"No jewelry?" asked the girl.

"Nothing, not even a wedding ring. Your father personally examined her effects. Somehow he connected the woman with the baby, but there was absolutely nothing. He had her decently buried——"

"I put a cross over her grave," said Warburton quietly, "on the chance that she might have been my mother."

"That was like you," said the girl softly.

"So I have no name. I may do wrong to that unknown mother but it is probable that I was a child of shame. There was no ring. And even if I found her I could bear no name but hers whatever it might be."

He was a proud man and this that he was saying was not easy as the two women could well understand.

"Tell me more."

"There is little more to tell. Your father was a generous man. Perhaps, if he had not found the body in the river opposite his door he would have sent me to some institution. I understand it made a deep impression upon him."

"I can testify to that," said Mrs. de Selden. "He has often told me the appeal the big, solemn, unsmiling baby made to him. You were always unsmiling, John."

"I think I shall change that if we go on."

"Tell me the rest," said the girl passing over the appeal.

"Your father named me Warburton, whimsically enough, from the avenue where he found me and John because he liked the name. I was given to respectable and worthy people to rear, and when he married your mother and no son blessed their union, he told her the story, and they took me

into their own family. I owe everything to him, —name, education, fortune, since he gave me my start,—and if you do not withdraw your consent, my wife. Whether you do or not, this had to be told to you and I have this to add, I shall abundantly justify you if knowing this, which no one living but your mother and you and I know, you find it impossible to go on. Even then I shall only be thankful to him because he has enabled me to know you through his kindness to that forlorn, abandoned baby on that bitter winter night forty years ago."

Chrissey de Selden rose and her mother with her.

"My dear," said the older woman. "I did not force this story from Mr. Warburton's lips. He told me that he intended to tell you at the first opportunity and he has done so. Your father was a very proud man. He valued family, birth, reputation, above everything, yet I believe if he were here he would be glad to have you the wife of so true and strong a man as John." She extended her hand to him. "My husband committed us to your care when he died," she continued, "and nobly have you fulfilled his trust. If I were to die I should not hesitate to commit to your care and affection the most precious thing he left behind—his daughter."

"I thank you. There is but one reward greater than that."

He looked gravely toward the girl, who quite understood. Here was her chance of escape, she

thought. Escape? Had she entered into a prison or— It was impossible to avail herself of that opportunity. After all what did it matter. Whimsical, fantastic as had been her father's fancy in his naming of the child, Warburton himself had made the name great and it really made no difference at all that he had no right to it.

"It makes no difference at all," she voiced her thought, looking up at him. "You are the Rudolph of Hapsburg of your family," she quoted lightly, forcing herself to smile, "Your patent of nobility dates from that winter night."

"That it was your father's hand that administered the accolade," he countered, attempting to emulate her own playfulness, "makes it the more satisfying."

"That is settled then," said the girl. "And now," she glanced through the door at the tall clock in the hall, "it is very late for dinner."

She wondered, when she spoke, if she would have thought of dinner if handsome Dick Neyland or even the gallant little Duke had been the one to whom she had pledged her hand.

"I've kept you waiting a long time. Let us go," said Warburton contritely.

"Perhaps some day you will find out."

"I shall never find out. I don't wish to. Since it is no bar to my possession of you it amounts to nothing. I presume," he answered as he followed her into the dining-room, "that you have no objection to a public announcement."

"The sooner the better."

"And the wedding."

"As we agreed,—the last of October."

"What day?"

"Thursday is the best day of all, isn't it, according to the popular rhyme?"

"I don't know any rhymes," he replied, "but any day you set will be the best day of all for me."

This was a more gallant speech than she had thought him capable of.

CHAPTER VII

TEMPTATION

WHILE this quiet little family dinner was being discussed at Warburton's home a dinner of quite another sort with quite other consequences was taking place in surroundings which could scarcely be characterized as homelike or suited for a family gathering; or, even within the loosest construction of the word, as proper. Billy Alton arranged it, and like everything Billy arranged it was an unique function quite worthy of the reputation of the host and the character of his guests.

The guests of honour were the Duca di Attavanti and Mr. Richard Neyland. Again Mr. Billy Alton's qualities as a composer of quarrels appeared to equal advantage with his talents as a master of *risque* entertainments. Billy was fond of referring to his little dinners as so "risique!" He foisted that charmingly humorous mis-pronunciation upon some of the numerous chorus ladies of his acquaintance, for Billy could speak French after a fashion, if not so correctly or so fluently as the Duke or Neyland.

Mr. Alton was about to signalize his withdrawal

for the second, or it might have been the third or fourth time for all that was definitely known—in his set the number was of little moment—from the ranks of the unwedded, temporarily. With the fatal facility with which such changes are brought about in New York he was about to take unto himself a young woman to whom, according to rumour, he had long been devoted. In fact his devotion, public and pronounced, had been the means whereby the lady had got her freedom from husband number two. Why she had divorced husband number one, was a matter of no consequence to Billy.

Fresh from Nevada, possessed of charms which had not yet become dulled by use, and blessed with much money, which the gentleman whose name she had borne previously had only been too glad to give her for his freedom, she was in every way a good match for the affluent Billy Alton. When it is said that they both moved in the highest social circles, in spite of the fact that some of the oldest families like the Tayloes would have none of the one or the other, all that is necessary has been recorded.

Billy Alton was more than a man about town. Like Neyland he had been a man about the world, but not in the same way. It had been his fancy to take his ease luxuriously in his inn wherever on the globe that inn might chance to be. He was a thoroughly likable, thoroughly up-to-date young American, quite admirable in many ways except

in his views of life, which, however, since they accorded with those held by so many of his contemporaries, he held with cheerful equanimity.

On one of his *dolce-far-niente* trips to Europe he had met the Duke. The latter had been attracted to him because he was so different, the usual basis for attraction. When the Duke decided to come to America he had cabled Alton and accordingly Alton met him at the steamer. His rooms had been arranged for, he had been put up at the best clubs, and to make the welcome complete Alton had planned a little dinner that night at one of the fastest and most exclusive resorts of young men about town. Exclusive as to its patrons, those who paid; not quite so discriminating as to those who attracted them there and profited from their presence.

Now it happened that Billy was a very warm friend, albeit a friend of the worst type, to Neyland. Neyland had not told any one of his return. There was no one who had much interest in his arrival since he was without kith or kin, so that his appearance was a surprise to his friend. Alton seized upon him at once. Neyland's apartment, which he reserved constantly in the big building on Park Avenue, had not been made ready for him. It would have been a cheerless place to go to. Alton insisted upon dispatching Neyland's man to get things in shape and meanwhile claimed him for the night.

There was to be a dinner-party. He winked at

Neyland, who well understood the low insinuation of the eyelid, and Neyland low-spirited, lonesome, depressed, and humiliated, agreed to come. In his excitement Billy had not mentioned that the Duke was to be present at the party, and as the latter and his man were busy with their baggage on the pier Neyland had no suspicion of it. He had some business affairs of his own to attend to after so long an absence. He told Alton he would meet him at his rooms in plenty of time to dress for the dinner. And then he went away.

As Alton and the Duke bumped over the rough cobbles with which New York considerably paves its approaches to its transatlantic steamer piers, the conversation turned on the voyage and it soon developed that there was bad blood between him and Neyland, Billy's two principal guests. Bad blood between two such men meant money or a woman. Money was out of the question since each had all he needed and since Billy could testify from experience that both were good losers. It must therefore be a woman. Under the circumstances it could be no other than Chrissey de Selden. Billy's questions went direct to the heart of the matter and seeing how much he knew the Duke at last told him everything including the news of her engagement to Warburton.

"It seems to me," said the practical American, at last, "that you both behaved like a couple of lunatics, and since the lady is for neither of you

I don't see any reason why you shouldn't be friends. Neyland's the best fellow in the world when he's sober, and I don't believe you bear malice for that jab in the shoulder."

The Duke, who had been inclined to take umbrage at the other's offhanded way of discussing things so personal, was forced to laugh.

"Other countries, other customs," he quoted in his broken English, which was sufficiently intelligible and quite delightful. Under the teaching of Miss Rose Tayloe, who had given him lessons on the voyage, he had progressed wonderfully. "It shall be as you say, *amico mio*. I do not intend to spoil my visit to your great country by private enmities and since *la bella signorina* obviously prefers neither of us it is foolish to quarrel. I know not how it will appeal to Signor Neyland but as for me——"

"Well that's handsome of you, Duke," said his American friend, "and inasmuch as he stuck a knife into you if you are willing to let by-gones be by-gones I don't see why he shouldn't. I'll see that he is, in fact."

"Very well," said the Duke, his pride a little ruffled. "But let me assure you most earnestly that if you or he or any gentleman in America thinks that because of that unfortunate happening any one of you is my match with the sword——"

"Go on," said the American laughing, "we're no sword fighters over here. I have no doubt you

could lick the whole caboodle of us with one hand if we came at you according to the rule."

"That is just it. You do not fight by the rules."

"We don't know 'em, that's the reason."

Consequently, when Neyland and the Duke met in Billy Alton's apartment before the supper there was no outbreak. The two men extended hands simultaneously, so that neither could accuse the other of being the first to bury the hatchet. Billy had prepared Neyland for the reconciliation.

"What in blazes is the use of continuing the quarrel with the Duke, who is one of the best fellows in the world if he is a Dago, when neither of you has a ghost of a show with the girl?" had been his irreverent but quite unanswerable argument.

The Duke's temper was more elastic than Neyland's. Marriage in his view was more a matter of arrangement than love anyway. Chrissey de Selden had dazzled him but he had not allowed himself to get so deeply involved as not to be able to look elsewhere with honour and dignity and a chance at happiness. He had already begun to realize that there were other fish in the American seas, although he would have died rather than have referred even metaphorically to so charming a girl as Rose Tayloe, for instance, as a fish. Accordingly he was more hearty and agreeable in the reconciliation than the other, which was the more magnanimous since he was the more injured of the two.

So they went to the dinner amicably enough. It was as such dinners always are, the fun and the guests were alike fast and furious. The gay youths and some whom youth had passed long since, enjoyed the witty, highly spiced repartee of the young ladies provided by the establishment for the purpose of stimulating the patrons to the full limit, with the exception of the Duke and Neyland.

The Italian was no prude. He had had his fling like other well-born and well-to-do young men of the continent. But there was a singular strain of simplicity and dignity about him, a heritage of his long ancestry in the mountains of the Abruzzi, which gave him a certain reserve in scenes like that. He was no spoil-sport, however. He was just different, a looker-on in this mad Vienna. Where the others drank to excess he was moderate. Where the others descended to depths he remained on the entrant level, not a high level in a place like that but still higher than the rest.

The real kill-joy was Neyland. He did not drink anything and he responded with a rough contempt quite unlike him even to the boldest feminine advances. He had drunk nothing in the smoking-room of the *Acquitania*. Chrissey de Selden's presence had kept him from it and in the recollection of what he had done that night at Sorrento, after one awful collapse at Genoa following the duel, he had remained sober in

Europe by keeping away from temptation. That was his only safe course. One reason why he so enjoyed exploring the wilds was because, whatever his inclination, he could get no whiskey there, and in the perils in which he invariably plunged he had to keep straight to keep alive.

He always came back from one of those adventures clear-eyed, ruddy-cheeked, ready, and resolute. And the spell of Chrissey de Selden's presence, although she had avoided him like a pestilence on the steamer, was still upon him. Without meaning profanation he contrasted her with the light-hearted—at least they looked so—light-headed, light-moralled young ladies who surrounded them, and he ate his dinner in gloomy silence.

When it broke up, that is when the men left the table with an intent to plunge lower and deeper throughout the night, he pleaded indisposition. Billy Alton, convinced that there must be something back of such a refusal, excused himself from the guests, and the Duke also expressing the desire to join the two Americans, the three men left the others, who were quite capable of having what they called a good time unaided, and went back to Alton's rooms.

Very snug and comfortable they looked. There was a fire burning on the hearth, on a low convenient stand a great silver waiter was placed. Within its narrow railing stood bottles, squat, fat, black, with labels that spoke of Scotland,

Ireland, and old Kentucky, and round-bottomed clearer bottles of soda in stands. There was a tub of ice and a box of Alton's big black imported Havanas, almost as strong and as deadly as the whiskey, with some priceless cigarettes for the Duke.

"Cheer up, old man," said Alton as the three sat down in low chairs before the fire after Alton had poured a very liberal drink for himself and a very modest one for the Duke and the cigars and cigarettes had been lighted. "Don't take it so hard."

He had not taken enough wine within for all wit to run out, but the various drinks he had imbibed had displaced a good deal of discretion and reticence.

"There's as good fish in the sea as have ever been caught," he hiccupped out. "Look at Attavanti here. He's a dead game sport all right. He takes it like a man and I have no doubt he'll find——"

"If you please," said the Duke, "I had much rather you do not bring any lady's name into the conversation. You will pardon me, I am sure."

"That's all right," Alton maundered on, "we know what you mean. Look at me. I'm going to be married next week to the finest woman in New York. You know when I first came here I thought she was the greatest little girl I'd ever met but she was married to Glitton then. I half made up my mind that I'd made a run for her anyway but while I was over in Italy shooting

with you, Attavanti, she got a divorce and married Harberd. That did make me mad. If I hadn't been in Europe I'd have been Johnny-on-the-spot all right with that lovely little grass widow. I thought she was too far above me for that sort of thing or I wouldn't have gone away. But if she could divorce Glitton there was no reason why she couldn't divorce Harberd, so I cut in when I came back. You've been away six months but I guess you've read all about it, Dick."

"Yes."

"She got her second divorce and I'm going to marry her next week."

"Er—pardon," asked the Duke, "is the practise common in America?"

"Oh, quite, in the best circles."

"And do you and the lady contemplate a long continuance of the forthcoming matrimonial relation?"

"You never can tell, old man. She may get tired of me or I may get tired of her, but I've got her now and I'm going to hold on to her until that time does come."

"What's this got to do with me," said Neyland abruptly. "Do you mean to insinuate——"

"I should think a blind man could see what I mean, and if you were not so dead in love you could see."

"Alton," thundered Neyland, "I won't hear another word."

"Yes you will," said the maudlin Alton im-

perturbably. "You're too big to attack me and this is my house and you are my guest and I'm not quite myself anyway," he went on. "I wouldn't despair if I were you. Warburton's twice as old as that girl and he's as cold as a fish. She'll get tired of him. Just you wait, you'll get her yet."

"If you say another word, I don't care if you are half my size," cried Neyland furiously, "I'll choke you till your face is as black as your character."

"I guess I'd be dead by the time you brought that about," laughed Billy. "Well, a man in love is always a fool, eh Duke?"

"Are you very much in love, Alton?" asked the Duke disdainfully.

"Passionately, and you mean I'm a fool. Well, it shows your Italian politeness that you didn't say it," admitted the even-tempered Billy. "I'm not going to quarrel with you two fellows about any woman or anything else. Pass the whiskey. You'll notice, Dick," he continued pouring himself another drink, "that I don't give the Duke any advice of that kind. He's a sensible man and he's already looking elsewhere. There's Ro——"

"Pardon me again," interrupted the Duke quickly, "I quite agree with Mr. Neyland, we cannot continue the discussion, even by implication, of any lady."

"Touchy too! You're a damn hot pair and there's not a trace of philosophy in either of you.

Everybody in New York is a philosopher when it comes to matrimony. Got to be. The one thing about married life in New York is that it's changeable. 'To one thing constant never,'" quoted the irrepressible Alton.

"If you will excuse me," said the Duke with great dignity, "it is not so in my country and I believe I like my country better."

"Every man to his taste," responded the host. "I've seen some mighty fine women in Italy and if it hadn't been for Becky Glitton-Harberd-whatever-was-her-first-name-I-don't-know I might have found a wife there."

"I am glad you did not," said the Duke gravely. "You would have to stick to one over there, I am afraid."

"Yes, I thought of that too."

"And now as it is quite late for a simple soldier"—he laughed pleasantly enough; after all, the ways of these Americans were no concern of his—"perhaps I may bid you good-night."

"I'll do more than that," said the obliging Billy, "I'll escort you to your rooms myself. Neyland won't mind being left alone."

"On the contrary," said Neyland savagely.

"Your bedroom is over there," said Alton, "you can turn in whenever you want."

"Tell your man not to disturb me in the morning. Good-night to both of you."

But Neyland did not go to bed. He sat before the fire staring into it and thinking. Of course

Chrissey de Selden must care a great deal for a man like Warburton to marry him, but would there be any natural affinity between twenty-two and forty-two. He did not know how old Warburton was and he gave himself all the benefit of the doubt. Could he, if he waited long enough, win her for his own?

Now if there was a good thing in Neyland it was his love for Chrissey de Selden. It had not sufficed to prevent his hideous conduct at Sorrento but he excused himself a little because he had not been master of himself then. He could not bear to think of the possibility that Billy Alton had put into his mind; it seemed another insult to her and yet he could not forget it. Nor was the situation even with that prospect, a pleasant one, for he loved her enough to be torn with jealous fury at the idea of her being married even for an hour to Warburton. He would fain not think of the future, immediate or remote,—both were agonizing.

The tumult in his breast shook him to the very centre of his being. This was really the first opportunity he had had to think the thing over undisturbed. He had been feverishly busy during the day, designedly so. But now! Chrissey de Selden in Warburton's arms! She had been thrown there by Neyland's action; Neyland who would have given his life for her love.

There is always a time when resisting power is weakest and the period of greatest demand in-

variably coincides with it. Alton's half-filled glass was within reach of Neyland's hand. The pungent odour of the liquor filled the air. The tempted man looked at it a long time. What was the use of fighting further? He was in hell already. He might as well get out of it whatever the devil could give. He took the glass, filled it to the brim. No ice, no water. He lifted it up and inhaled it. For a moment he forgot. Then he put it down and thought a little longer. Then he lifted it up once more and the inhalation was longer and more satisfying. He tasted it, just a swallow or two. He put it down again. He could drink like a gentleman. He was his own master. Who would gainsay that? He could stop if he would. Of course!

He thought of Chrissey de Selden. Well he had touched her in Sorrento. She would never be the same girl again. He laughed. She had his brand on her. Thoughts of the *filles de joie* who had hovered around him that night obtruded themselves. He saw their smiling, leering, beautiful, evil faces. Yes, it was indicative of the tumult in his soul and the depths to which he could descend. There Chrissey de Selden stood in the midst of them not smiling, not leering, still, pale, cold, proud—but there! In changing mood he cursed himself and suddenly drank deep and cursed himself and drank again deeper. Then he laughed and, tossing the glass into the fire, he seized the bottle and drank again and saw her

once more under his hand as that night, only now she was smiling like the rest.

He got up at last, put on his hat and coat and staggered out. He hailed a passing night-hawk cab and took the deep plunge, by this time dead to every finer feeling, dead to every uplifting dream, dead to every noble aspiration—a beast. Which is an insult to the animal. Into the mire he sank forgetting everything but the feel of the warm, loathsome ooze.

When Billy Alton returned he looked into Neyland's room and was not surprised to find it empty. The night air had somewhat sobered that convivial young man. He was in possession of his wits. He crossed the room and looked down at the tray of glasses and bottles and then he laughed.

"That'll do him good," he soliloquized. "He's on the town now. He'll forget her. Nothing like one woman to knock out another. Well, I don't want to forget Becky but just the same I'll take another to her health, and may she be Mrs. Alton until we are both good and tired of the relationship."

CHAPTER VIII

THE VOICE OF SOCIETY

WHEN John Warburton arrived at his office the next morning he was greeted by a battalion of reporters. His return after so long an absence gave the newspaper men their first opportunity to get in touch with him. They were filled with questions. He was too wise a man to antagonize the newspapers unnecessarily and although he could keep his own counsel—none better—he knew the value of journalistic publicity too well to neglect it when it was to his interest to use it.

Two reasons actuated him in giving notice of his engagement. He was too shrewd not to realize that the story of that night at Sorrento might easily get into the papers, probably in garbled versions. It would reflect no credit on any one and the best check to the discussion of the unfortunate affair would be the announcement of his engagement. The second motive for publishing the engagement was that it would make the marriage a little more certain.

The word of Philip de Selden had been his bond and his only daughter was not unlike him.

When she said she would do a thing she did it, even to her own hurt. Now that he had proposed to her and she had accepted him he was resolutely determined to have her for his wife.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," he said as the reporters followed him into his private office. "I presume you have some questions to ask me, but before you do I have an announcement to make."

"We're all attention, Mr. Warburton," said the oldest reporter, who had interviewed him oftenest and knew him best, as note books and pencils came out.

"You may announce my engagement to Miss Christianna de Selden, daughter of the late Philip de Selden."

John Warburton had never been a ladies' man but he had taken his place in society. His New York home, his Newport cottage, his hunting lodge, his yacht, had been open freely and generously to Mrs. de Selden and her daughter and their friends. Indeed it was for that daughter that he had acquired all these things. And Warburton had not withdrawn himself from these various gaieties, but no woman's name had ever been connected with his. Gossipers had speculated as to why he had not married and whether he ever would, but idly. This was a social announcement of the first importance.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Warburton," began the oldest reporter, "but isn't Miss de Selden your ward?"

"She was. But Miss de Selden is of age and she has done me the honour to accept my hand."

"Pretty big hand," said a young reporter, meaning no offence.

"It has been a heavy one," admitted Warburton, "on some men. I trust it will touch lightly every woman and especially my wife-to-be."

"Of course," said the oldest reporter shooting a frowning glance at his bold youthful confrère. "May we ask when the marriage will take place?"

"The last of October, Thursday the thirty-first, to be exact."

"And where?"

"No arrangements have been made. They will be at the pleasure of Miss de Selden."

"Have you made any plans as to the wedding journey or——?"

"No plans of any sort except to try to make Miss de Selden as happy as she deserves and as little conscious of her gracious condescension as possible. You need ask me no more questions about this, gentlemen. I have given you all the information that is necessary."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Warburton," said the oldest reporter. "Now if you will give us your views about the financial situation in Europe we will be very much obliged to you."

And that being no concern of the readers of this story they are introduced to Chrissey de Selden's morning-room and Miss Rose Tayloe.

Rose Tayloe was the antithesis of Chrissey de Selden in everything except sweetness and light. She was tall, blonde, and blue-eyed. When the little Duke was with her he availed himself of every modicum of height in his endeavour to stand level with her and even then he did not quite reach.

Rose Tayloe was as impetuous and enthusiastic as Chrissey de Selden was quiet and composed. She burst into the room like a whirlwind, caught the girl in her strong young arms, and fairly lifted her in the air for a moment. Her first words showed how completely she misunderstood the situation.

"My dear Chris," she cried in her enthusiastic way, "it's the most romantic thing on earth"—which it certainly was not—"you deceitful thing. I never dreamed of it"—and no one had—"John Warburton of all persons. I'd as soon think of marrying an ice-berg or a granite mountain," she ran on. "The poor little Duke is heart-broken. But do you know what he said when he left me yesterday? That I had comforted him greatly and I believe I did. If he were only an inch or two higher, but a Duke's title does lift a man up."

Here Rose Tayloe stopped and blushed.

"I believe," said Chrissey de Selden quickly,—was it because of an anxiety to avoid the discussion of her own affairs?—"that you and he will hit it off splendidly. You are better fitted for him than I. You are blonde, he is dark."

"Yes, of course, but I don't know whether I want the Duke or not," ran on the vivacious Miss Tayloe. "There is some excitement in capturing him. He is coming around this afternoon and we are motoring to the country club in the car. But tell me about yourself. The Duke is nothing but a possibility, while Warburton is an actuality. Are you madly in love with him?"

"Passionately," said Chrissey de Selden as coolly as John Warburton himself might have answered.

"Chris," said Rose, dropping down into a seat and staring up into the face of the other, "you don't mean that you—"

There was dubiety enough in her voice to show that she fully understood the meaning of her friend's words. Her mother had asked Chrissey de Selden that question and now Rose Tayloe and although she did not know it both the Duke and Neyland had put the same question to Warburton. The fact that everybody asked that was not without significance.

"Surely," continued Rose, "you would not marry him without loving him. I know he is wealthy and great and—but——"

"Why should I marry him at all if I did not love him?"

"But Chris, how can you? He is so much older than you and so cold and so reserved. Sometimes he makes me shudder. The more frivolous

I am, the more glacial he becomes. I've tried to flirt with him myself."

"Is there any one you haven't tried to flirt with?"

"Not many," laughed the other girl, "but I gave it up. You might as well flirt with a bronze statue. They are warm in colour at any rate."

"Some of them are green."

"Yes, but whatever John Warburton is, he is not green."

"He is about love making."

"Chris, you don't mean—didn't he ever——?"

"He never did."

"But he will. Have you thought——?"

"Of course I have. He had kissed me many times as his ward but since I came out—well what are you looking so strangely at me for?" went on the betrothed. "Why should he not kiss me? I am engaged to him. I shall be his wife."

"There is no reason on earth why he should not, of course, but that he has not does seem strange. Why lots of men have——"

"I know what you mean, Rose, but I am different. I like the way Mr. Warburton has treated me."

"And didn't he offer even to take you in his arms when you said, yes?"

"It was on the bridge of the *Acquitania* yesterday coming into New York. I think he laid his hand on mine and that was all."

"Well, he is a strange lover. Why the Duke

kissed my hand last night when he bade me good night in a way that——”

“Yes, but Mr. Warburton is not in the least like the Duke.”

“Or like Dick Neyland,” said Rose.

“No, he isn’t at all like Mr. Neyland. Thank God for that!”

“Chris, tell me, if it hadn’t been for that night at Sorrento when he—you know—might not Dick Neyland——”

“Never! I wouldn’t have him if he were the last man on earth.”

“But he’s so young and handsome and dashing and wicked, you know. Why I think that duel between him and the Duke was the most romantic thing I ever heard of. The Duke is the bravest of men. He says if Dick had stood off and fought him he would have killed him, but no one could expect such a bull-like rush. Dick must have been frantic with love for you, and the Duke too.”

“I give the Duke credit for being enough of a gentleman to resent an insult to any woman. Just let some one insult you and you’ll see if he doesn’t do as much for you, Rose.”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

“John Warburton would never fight a duel for any one, he’d just pick his enemy up in his big hands and crush him.”

“Who were the Warburtons anyway?” asked Rose changing her tack. “You know we Virginia

Tayloes are death on family. I know about yours but what about his?"

"I know little about his family. He was a protégé of my father's."

"And he was your guardian and now he is going to be your husband."

"Now my husband."

"Well, I am sure you will be very happy if he is the man you want to marry. At least he is a gentleman, whatever his family, and he can be very agreeable under that icy mask of his, even if he wouldn't flirt with me. When is the wedding to be?"

"Thursday, the last of October, and you are to be maid of honour."

"Where will you have it?"

"At St. Thomas's, of course. The Bishop and the Rector will officiate."

"Will it be a great wedding?"

"I suppose it will have to be."

"How exciting!" cried Rose. "Maid of honour! I wonder who will be the best man?"

"How would the Duke suit?"

"Splendidly," laughed Rose.

"Well, if you get him sufficiently consoled so that he can go through the ceremony without challenging any one I guess he will do."

"Wouldn't it be fun if we could have Dick Neyland?"

"Rose," said the other girl quickly and peremptorily, "no one knows anything about that

affair except you and the Duke and Mr. Warburton. I do not want it to be known if it is possible. Of course there are suspicions but the facts must be kept quiet. I wouldn't have Mr. Neyland at my wedding in any capacity whatsoever. I hate, I loathe, I abominate the man. If you had seen him as I you would understand. I'm tired of society anyway. It's too foolish and——"

"Do you think you can get out of it by marrying Mr. Warburton and his millions?"

"I don't know. At least I shall have a strong man to look out for me. I shall be free to attempt a lot of things I haven't been able to try. I want to do something for humanity. I want to be something worth while in this world. No one on earth could help me to that as Mr. Warburton."

Rose Tayloe was sophisticated but not sufficiently philosophic to realize that disappointment in love is more often than not back of the desire to do something for humanity and that it is almost invariably the cause for which society, loved heretofore, is held so lightly and contemptuously.

"So far as loving John Warburton is concerned," said Chrissey coming back to the main point at issue with her usual directness, "I suppose I do not love him as I fancied I should love the man I married. But there is no man on earth for whom I have greater respect or admiration, and there is no one to whom I would rather trust myself and my future. He is the soul of honour and the soul of dignity and——"

"Yes, I know," said Rose, "and of course you are very wise and all that but still maybe one would be happier with less exalted virtue and more love."

"I don't know, but at any rate I'm going to try with Mr. Warburton and there's nothing more to be said about it."

"Except to wish you every happiness," interrupted Rose, again taking Chrissey to her heart in a way that John Warburton would never have presumed to do.

CHAPTER IX

THE PLEA OF THE BREAKING

So great an alliance—the word is used advisedly of this marriage—is not to be brought about without attention to a multitude of details. John Warburton's mind was highly executive but in these matters he found himself at a loss. It was the girl and her mother who planned the approaching wedding. Miss de Selden must have a trousseau of a magnificence suited to her station and future. Her friends, whose surprise had not been less than Rose Tayloe's, must be given opportunity to entertain her.

Warburton would have preferred the simplest of weddings and the girl, if she had been marrying some one else, might have had the same view, but as it was she plunged eagerly into all these distractions with a sort of not uncommon madness. They occupied her mind and tired her body and left her no time for reflection. Besides, it was the custom of the set to which she belonged. Instead of preparing for the holy estate of matrimony with its obligations and possibilities with quietness and dignity and reserve, there was a

glory, a hurry, an excitement, and a publicity about it which she at least could hardly have escaped. The papers were full of it. The most intimately personal details were seized upon with avidity and exploited mercilessly, and when no details were available the easy invention of the American newspaper made no difficulty in supplying them.

All this at least served one purpose. An attempt to start stories about that night in Sorrento died aborning. No one succeeded in coupling Miss de Selden's name with that of Mr. Neyland. His threat to do something and to show himself a man was not kept. After his downfall the night of the dinner his excesses became the talk of the circle in which he moved. Even Billy Alton, at last married and consequently a little more serious-minded than usual, remonstrated with him, but in vain. The Duke, too, sought him out and tried to help him, but equally to no purpose. Even in his degradation he made several attempts to see Chrissey de Selden. He called at the house several times, he wrote to her, once he came to the side of her car as it was checked by the traffic officer at one of the cross streets on Fifth Avenue and spoke to her. She turned her head away and, the clear signal having been given at the moment, she bade her chauffeur drive on. She had been shocked at his appearance on the steamer. She was more than shocked at his face then.

A few days before the wedding when she hap-

pened to have an idle moment one afternoon and sat dreaming in her apartment, Colonel Tayloe's card was brought to her. She had always liked that gallant old Virginian and she welcomed a visit from him. Her position was becoming increasingly difficult. In spite of the mad hurry of her life she was beginning to realize that marriage was more than an alliance. She was not merely taking John Warburton's name and the head of his table but she was taking John Warburton, too; or what perhaps expressed it more clearly he was taking her! The reserve with which he continued to treat her could not be maintained forever. She would be his, body and—well, her soul would be her own. But would it? And whenever she was alone and had time for thought these considerations would obtrude. Other women had married and had given themselves up to men without loving them, but she, could she do that? Was she different?

There was no colour in her cheeks that afternoon as she sat there, alone, guard down, mask off, and for a moment she looked as torn in soul as Neyland himself. Well, anyway, brides in that set seldom reached the wedding day in the best condition. The excitement of the ceremony itself gave them a fictitious strength but there was usually something of a relapse after the benediction. No one could go the pace and endure the physical, mental, and spiritual strain of these days without showing it as Chrissey de Selden did.

Warburton saw it, of course, and so did her mother. The latter set it down to the excitement of the preparation. The former wondered if there were an added cause. Whatever it might be he knew now, so intense had been the growth of his love for her, that he would go through with the marriage under any circumstances and at any risk. Sometimes even her happiness was forgot in his own determination and desire, yet he never betrayed either. At least that is what he fancied. But sometimes the woman saw beneath the surface and what she saw should have warned her to stop while it was yet time. Well, as she was lonely that afternoon she was glad for Colonel Tayloe's visit.

"My dear girl," he began solicitously as she entered the drawing-room, "you aren't looking well. This excitement is too much for you."

"Yes, I suppose so. Thank heaven it will all be over next Thursday!"

"It has been my experience that excitement doesn't always end with the wedding."

"Perhaps not, but Mr. Warburton is so composed and so——"

"Umph," said the Colonel reflectively. "I wouldn't count too much on that." He looked carefully at her. "You are a very attractive woman, my child, enough to awaken a heart throb in a statue. But I didn't come here to talk about that. I have a difficult errand and I

confess I don't know quite how to discharge it. I want to ask a favour of you."

"You couldn't ask any favour of me that I wouldn't grant, Colonel."

"I'm not quite sure whether you ought to grant this favour or not."

"Why ask it then?"

"I can't very well help it. It concerns some one I have known a long time and to whom I am bound by many ties."

"Surely it isn't Rose."

"Of course not. What favour could I ask for Rose? She can ask for herself."

"You mean?"

"It's Dick Neyland," blurted out the Colonel desperately.

"And what favour do you ask for him?"

"He wants to see you."

"For what purpose?"

"To apologize. He knows he acted abominably in Sorrento. I don't know what he did but he says he can't live unless he has your forgiveness."

"I forgive him. I dismiss him from my mind entirely."

"That is not enough. He has tried in vain to see you. He has called at the house, he has written you, and even stopped your car on the street, I understand."

"He has done all those things."

"And you have refused to have anything to do with him?"

"I have and I shall continue to do so."

"My dear girl," said the old Colonel earnestly, "is it quite fair if a man wants to make amends that he should be given no opportunity?"

"Nothing he can say can make amends."

"Perhaps not, but he thinks so and I think so, too. As an old friend of yours, as one who knew you from infancy and was your father's friend, I ask you as a favour to me to give him just five minutes with you. Won't you do it?"

"Where is he?"

"I left him in the reception-room across the hall. Please! It won't hurt you and it will be of some benefit to him. If ever a man was going straight to hell it's Neyland. I've tried to pull him up. We all have. Maybe if you saw him for a moment it might help. Be charitable! Some day you may need it yourself, you know."

"For your sake, Colonel, I'll see him. Will you stay?"

"He wants to see you alone."

"I'm afraid to be alone with him."

"Is it as bad as that?"

Was it as bad as that? Was Chrissey de Selden afraid of Richard Neyland or was she afraid of herself? She could think of John Warburton and some of the thoughts in her heart drove the blood from her cheek. That Richard Neyland was there brought the colour to her face. Was there anything significant in that?

"Will you wait in the reception-room within call?"

"If you wish," said the Colonel. "Now may I bring him in?"

Chrissey could not trust herself to speak. She nodded.

Presently Neyland entered. He was always immaculately clad. His personal habits did not affect his dress, but his face, his eyes, his shaking hands, his voice betrayed him.

"Miss de Selden," he began striving for control as she looked at him. "I had to take this way. You refused to see me. You did not answer my letters."

"I destroyed them unread."

"You wouldn't speak to me on the street. I couldn't live until I had asked your forgiveness. My God," he burst out, "I never knew how I loved you until I had lost you! And for such a reason. Life has been hell to me. There is nothing I haven't tried to make me forget you and my own shame, to make me think of other things and now, now—" he stepped toward her.

"Don't come near me," said the girl quietly. "You came too near once."

"Chris, you need not fear me. If it would do any good I'd cut off the hand——"

"How dare you refer to it?"

"I don't know. I don't know anything except that I must have at least your forgiveness. I have lost your affection."

And if he had not been so blind and shaken with passionate agitation and remorse and unrequited love he might have seen that possibly he had not lost all that.

"I must have your forgiveness," he repeated, "I was mad that night."

"I had proof of that."

"You loved me then. I could have sworn it. I could have had you for my wife if I could only have controlled, if——"

"I think we would better end this interview——" began the girl with a coldness she did not feel.

She realized to her horror that she longed to take the man in her arms. He looked so broken, so pitiful.

"Oh, for God's sake!"

"It serves no purpose. You know I am to be married to Mr. Warburton next week. You ask me to forgive the insult you put upon me, an insult the more unbearable because I thought you different, because I cared—then—not now," she cried swiftly as he lifted his head.

"This marriage, forgive me, do you enter upon it freely?"

"Is there any power on earth that could coerce me?" cried the woman. "Your question is another insult."

"I'm mad, quite mad, I can see it all now. I should not have asked anything of you. I cannot forget you but at least I can keep away from you and——"

"I will forgive you," said the woman suddenly, "if you show yourself worthy."

"And you will be friends with me. You will let me see you, you will——"

"That is impossible. Our ways lie apart. The whole city rings with your evil doings. If you will show yourself the man I thought you were when I—before I—you may have my forgiveness."

"Thank you," said the man. "I make no promises. I do not know. Perhaps it is too late."

"It is never too late."

"And after all, what is your forgiveness when I lose you? Oh, if you had only understood then! If I hadn't run away! If I had only stayed and fought it out? If you had taken me when you——"

"That is all passed," said the girl, "we must not speak of it. I was wrong to have acceded to Colonel Tayloe's request. This interview is terrible for both of us. For your own sake try to be a man."

"I could have done it for you."

"A man who is not a man for his own sake cannot be so for a woman. I have faith in you in spite of what has passed. You can merit my forgiveness, the forgiveness of all woman-kind whose purity and innocence you have flouted, by a changed course. Your name has become a byword, a shame, and a reproach. As a decent woman I might have refused to see you, but you can do differently, I am sure. I shall be glad to

hear. Good-bye. You must go. I cannot stand any more."

He fell on his knees, took the skirt of her dress in his hands, and bowed over it, then struggled to his feet and stumbled out of the room. He did not summon Colonel Tayloe but plunged through the door and into the waiting taxi outside. Chrissey de Selden sank down in her chair. She dropped her arms on the table and buried her head in them, her body shaking with sobs. At last Colonel Tayloe came in. He laid his hand upon her head.

"My poor child, was it so terrible? I should not have subjected you to this. Richard Neyland isn't worth these tears."

"Such a wreck," sobbed the woman, "he might have been anything. He might even have been my husband for I——"

"Stop!" said the Colonel. "Confidences like this I cannot receive. Speech is not good for you now. You are going to marry the finest man on earth."

"I know. I know."

"There must be no other."

"There shall not be."

"As for Neyland?"

"I said I would forgive him if he showed the world that he was worthy."

"And he said?"

"He said he would do it for me and I told him that he must do it for the sake of his manhood.

I know that no man who fails so terribly, who shows me such a side to his character——”

“We all have two sides, my dear, and sometimes many. We must not condemn a man altogether for his bad side. Some of poor Neyland’s weaknesses came down from his fathers, not that that is an excuse. A man may be born in iniquity and in sin may his mother conceive him as the Bible says, but his condition is not irremediable. Every man has got to stand for himself.”

“That is what I told him.”

“I hope it may have some effect. There is good in Neyland, lots of it. If he could have won the love of a woman like yourself he might have——”

“Would you give him Rose?”

“Well, er——”

“You see! I am going to marry John Warburton who is, as you say, a man all through.”

“And do you love him?” burst out the Colonel suddenly.

The old question! Before she could answer he apologized.

“I have no right to ask that. Of course you do,” he said. “He is a man to make any woman happy,” he went on, realizing that in the ordinary explanation of the term Warburton could hardly be described as a lovable personality.

“I’m ashamed to have given away like this,” said the girl rising, “but he looked so terrible.”

"I understand. I'm sorry I brought this trouble upon you."

"I'm glad you did. Perhaps it may help him. Do you know you are to give me away next Thursday in default of a father?"

"I will do it quite happily," said the old Colonel pleased with the honour, "and the more willingly because I know that I could not give you to a better man."

And still as he went out of the door he sighed as he thought of Richard Neyland. That young man began that day a battle, a campaign rather, which he pursued for some time. In that campaign he did not always advance. He did not go from strength to strength. One success did not follow another. There were checks, halts, reverses, retrogrades. He had little to which to look forward at the end. Victory would bring him nothing but the restoration of his own self-respect. He would have given that for one woman, at least he thought so in his present mind. Yet because of that one woman, forever lost to him, he persevered.

The wedding gifts to Chrissey de Selden were so rare, so beautiful, their value ran up to such countless thousands that by its very simplicity one of them attracted more attention than all the others that came swarming in from all over the world. "To him who hath shall be given indeed." This one gift came anonymously. At least she found no card. It was in a Tiffany box

but the jewelers could tell them nothing save that it had been ordered by a person whom they could not identify. It bore no mark of any kind. It was a rude bracelet of hammered silver such as a barbarian might have worn in the Middle Ages. In the silver band were set thirteen coloured stones all of them semi-precious and of little value. These jewels were apparently set at random, at least no effort was made to match them in colour or size or cutting, and yet the rude ornament aroused more interest than the collar of pearls or the tiara of diamonds, or the carcanet of rubies that were displayed with the rest.

When it came Chrissey de Selden had slipped it on her round white arm and had wondered curiously who sent it and what it meant. And everybody else wondered the same thing.

If she had had more time, or less, she might have broken the engagement. She denied herself to everybody, even to Warburton, on the night of Neyland's visit. That evening one of the merry functions arranged for the bridal party had to dispense with her presence. Rose Tayloe took her place and explained that the bride-to-be was suffering from a severe headache. She did not even allow her mother to be with her. She dismissed her maid and lay on the bed face downward fighting it out.

She knew now, in spite of his terrible affront, what he had done, and what he was, that she loved Richard Neyland. If the wedding had

been set for that night she would have declined it. If it had been far enough away for her to have allowed her feeling for Neyland to get the better of her she would have declined it but she did not have to make the decision on the morrow and there was not time enough for her to get used to the idea of backing out.

She dug her hands into the covering of the bed as wounded men in battle clutch the earth and agonize alone. She was entirely clear-headed in the premises. She loathed and hated herself for allowing her thought to incline to Neyland. She pictured Warburton's qualities, all his excellencies, all his virtues. They weighed as light as thistle down in the balance she held between the two men and yet as the long hours of struggle wore away she decided to go on with her wedding. The motives that urged her to this conclusion were, perhaps, too complex for her recognition. She had all the stubborn pride of the De Seldens for one thing. She would not stoop to Richard Neyland. Gratitude and honour inclined her to Warburton. In her self-analysis she thought little of him. His happiness did not greatly enter into her calculations.

Among other things she had the arrogance of her family. Warburton would be amply rewarded by getting her on any terms, she thought. She was so torn between the two men that she did not think clearly of the solemn obligations of matrimony. It was a choice of ways that was presented

to her. She instinctively felt that to turn to Neyland would be to go down while to keep to Warburton would be to go up. Her point of view was purely selfish, even if unconsciously so. She would not deliberately have brought harm or sorrow to Warburton for the world. In some other mood she was quite capable of sacrificing herself to him. Indeed it seemed to her at times that she was doing that very thing. She did not perceive that loving Neyland and marrying Warburton simply because she could not bring herself to marry Neyland was doing Warburton a frightful injustice.

What was involved in being a wife in anything more than name to Warburton did not then appear to her. He had been so devoted, so self-effacing, he had shown such abnegation and restraint, that what would have been ordinary apprehension was more or less in abeyance. She knew more or less what she was doing but it was not thrust violently in her face under the circumstances, and she was unable to think clearly and coherently at best in her growing agitation.

She was terribly shaken by the scene of the afternoon. Had the consciousness that he had lost her driven Neyland further into the depths? It was a testimony at least to her power over him. Warburton would never insult her. He would never presume. She had never seen the look from which she had shrunk on Neyland's face on Warburton's. She never would see it, she was sure.

She was as good and pure a girl as ever lived and yet she almost caught herself wishing that her husband-to-be was not so poised and cold. If he had snatched her rudely to him at some time and crushed her against his breast and taken his fill of kisses she would have been furious of course and yet— Suppose he had laid his hand on her as— She writhed under these thoughts. She was filled with shame and humiliation that she had them, yet she had them.

She rose after a while, threw on the lights, looked at herself in the mirror. She measured herself by the accepted standards and found herself beautiful even in her grief and disarray. She was worth any man's fighting for. Her breath came quicker. Her bosom rose and fell as she stared. No wonder Richard Neyland had—How could Warburton be so insensible? He did not deserve——

Convulsively she tore at the laces at her breast as if they impeded some further expression of her being. Then she sat down and buried her face in her hands and sobbed, ashamed. What had her thoughts been? Into what wild current had they run? Into what abyss had they threatened to plunge her?

She rose dry-eyed again, firmly resolved if Neyland brought such thoughts into her maidenly heart it was well that she was rid of him. For her soul's sake she would not think of him again. Warburton was quieter, gentler. She ought to be

glad. He was a haven of refuge. She must so regard him. She would go on with the marriage. He was scarcely a man to her in his restraint. She would be safe. These terrible passions would cease to tear her. Tortured through many an hour she fell asleep.

BOOK II
WEDDED

CHAPTER X

AFTERNOON

It was a white and trembling woman who walked unsteadily up the aisle of St. Thomas's Church on the last day of October. The church was crowded to the doors and there was almost a riot because of the multitude in the streets. She passed through it all as in a dream. She caught herself glancing aside beneath her veil as she walked with bowed head, seeking— Whom? Was Neyland there?

Then she suddenly was aware of John Warburton, straighter, grimmer, sterner than ever, standing at the foot of the chancel steps, a great contrast to the little Duke, who had accepted the inevitable with a good grace and was looking with much appreciation at Rose Tayloe, a glorious and splendid figure walking alone before the bride. The mist in Chrissey de Selden's eyes and the pain in her heart made Warburton look the more masterful to her. Perhaps after all it would have been better if— No, it was too late.

She went through the service mechanically, scarcely comprehending the words that were

said. The hand of the Bishop on her head in benediction seemed to weigh her down. She could never rise, she thought. It was Warburton who lifted her up. For the first time she shivered under his touch. She began to realize what she had done as she turned and faced the great smiling congregation while the notes of the wedding march pealed over her head. The realization affrighted her. She grew a little faint. Was it from the fragrance of the flowers or the violence of her emotions?

Warburton steadied her. She wondered vaguely how she looked. She flushed a little under his searching glance and then she forced her lips to smile and held her head high as she walked down the aisle. The cool breeze of the October day—how bright it was, it would have been more in keeping if it had rained—brought a little added colour to her cheeks.

Warburton put her in the car and got in after her. She was alone with him, yet through the windows she could see the crowds and be seen by them. As he had done on the great ship he only laid his hand over her hand. His fingers clasped around hers firmly, somehow differently. He was taking his own. Again a more vivid realization of the fact that she was lost to herself beyond recall came to her. She was his. She looked suddenly, fearfully, at this man whose features might have been carved out of stone, only no stone image ever had eyes that blazed

like his. She was afraid, horribly afraid, yet she did not withdraw her hand.

She had entered into all the festivities incident to the wedding—the congratulations, the railleries, the breakfast—with feverish gaiety. She was glad for every one of them. She would fain have had them last forever. Her mother had to force her away from the table to doff her bridal finery and make ready for the wedding journey, which was to be a short one. A ride through the wonderful Ramapo hills to the top of the mountain where John Warburton had built himself a bachelor lodge, to be a bachelor lodge no longer, overlooking the valley of the Hudson. He had been accustomed to go there sometimes for rest and freedom from interruption. He had suggested that place and she had acquiesced. Why not? One place was as good as another since it had to be somewhere.

The merrymaking was over at last and they were in the car together again. At the last moment she had declined the limousine and had asked for the touring car. Once again Warburton sought to take her hand. This time she had impulsively withdrawn it. He had said nothing, but she knew what he felt and after a time she reached over and put her gloved hand upon his own. He made no effort to take it but he did not move to disturb it. His eyes showed his gratitude. They said little to each other. What conversation there was he initiated, and that was

not much save to assure her that he knew how blessed he had been, how fortunate that day had made him, to swear to her that at any sacrifice he would assure her happiness, that she should be first with him in everything and always, that everything he could do he would do and if he had not wit to divine what she wished she had only to indicate it.

Unusually quiet, unusually gentle, was stern John Warburton in that long ride. After a time she leaned back in the luxurious car, laid her head against the cushions, and went to sleep, still with her hand resting upon that of her husband. For her to have placed it there indicated an iron resolution, the power of which he could not dream. Yet it was characteristic that she went to sleep with him there. She trusted him like a child. Indeed she still looked upon him more with the eyes of a child than of a wife. Strange condition for one so lately wedded.

Warburton knew how tired she was. Something of the fire through which she had passed had been burned into her and he saw scars, as it were, on her face. He took oath before heaven that he would deal gently with this girl who had been committed to him as a child. He would do it because he loved her, and because of what he owed to the girl's father. There must have been good stuff in that mother, if such she were, whom they found face downward in the icy river. There must have been something of value in that unknown father,

wherever he might be, that had laid the foundation upon which Warburton with Philip de Selden to guide him had builded his character. He had often thought harshly of them but in that long ride under the trees, beginning to show autumn's glorious colours, and over the hills and far away, his thoughts were a little more kind. He could understand what love was, to what it might lead men at least—and women!

If he had followed his inclination he would have gone down on his knees in the car to that small and slender figure. He would have lifted her up in his arms as a child, he would have gathered her to his heart if he had permitted himself that happiness. But he did not. In her sleep she was sacred. Yet he was a man with all a man's emotions and passions and he hungered for the sound of her voice, the look in her eyes, the touch of her lips. He recalled that he had never kissed her lips in all his life as a lover. Now it was different. The privilege of a lover might have been his before, the privilege of a husband must be his now. Presently! He was glad he had waited.

The car stopped. He had forgotten the journey looking at her, and the stoppage awakened her.

"We are home," he said.

The words struck her like a blow. Home was where her mother was, where she had spent her bright young womanhood. It was not here in this rough lodge on the mountain top. The

oldest servants, whom she had known for years, who had been sent up for the occasion, received her at the door. A huge fire burned in the broad stone chimney in the great living room. It was warm. It was comfortable. Yes, it was even inviting. But it was with a growing agitation that she stepped within.

Warburton did not offer to help her with her wraps as another lover might have done, not because he did not wish to but he had grown strangely diffident. Now that he could surely do what he liked with her, something held him back. It was the servants who cared for her.

"Will you go to your room before we have dinner?" he asked. "You will find it at the head of the staircase. Mine is just across the hall."

It was a sort of a respite. She had grown more and more nervous and excited and apprehensive and so she went gladly. He had furnished the room with every luxury for her, taking out of it the simpler things which had been provided for the men who had hitherto been his guests. His very thoughtfulness increased her perturbation. She looked at the bed and stumbled back against the wall. She bit her lip. This would never do. She must go on. She completed her toilet and turned to go down-stairs. She met him at the door. He, too had changed his dress and was looking in.

"Do you like it?" he asked.

"It's perfect."

Indeed it was, a room for a bride, delicate, dainty, and virginal.

"Let us go down-stairs and break bread together, Christianna," he said quietly.

Always Christianna, never Chrissey or Chris! And then he put his arm around her gently and before she realized it he kissed her on the lips.

"My wife," he whispered. "Great God, that you should come to me!"

"Let us go," said the woman, her voice breaking a little.

She had not given him back the kiss and he had not noticed. What had come over him? The touch of her lips had so stirred the deeps of his soul that he noticed nothing. The deeps of her soul were stirred too, but in a different way. She made a pretence at eating and drinking. She replied to his conversation as best she could but she was not inclined to talk and little silences fell between them.

"Do you know," said Warburton as they finally passed into the big room and stood before the fire, "I don't mind your being silent. It's enough for me just to look at you. I am a man of few words."

"And of great thoughts," she said, trying desperately not to be too still.

"I have great thoughts when I look at you, Christianna. Do you know you are the first woman who has ever been in this lodge and I think I shall never let a man or other women

come into it again. It shall be sacred to you and to me. Let us sit before the fire."

She was so tired she willingly acceded to his suggestion.

"Tell me about yourself," said the girl as she sat down, Warburton standing by the mantel looking upon her, his favourite position. Never afterward could she see a man stand by a mantel or fireplace and look at her without thinking of him. The light was in her eyes. His face was in the shadow. She could not see clearly what his face expressed. She scarcely dared to look. She was afraid of what might be there.

He could talk if he wished to, if there were inspiration enough, and he had it that night. He told her of his boyish life, not sparing his shame when he found out how he had come to be. He told her of his ambitions, of his determination to succeed, to make his nondescript name respected and honoured, to become a power, to be courted and feared and counted upon in the world. He had done it for the salving of his pride, for his own self-respect at first, and then when she came back from school he had dreamed dreams and had seen visions of which she was the centre and he had begun to work for her while he waited without hope. He poured out his soul to her in a naked revelation of himself that moved her to admiration if not to love.

"Now," said the man at last, "all that I have achieved in the past is as nothing to what I have

achieved today. I have won you, Christianna, and all that I shall do in the future will be for you, Christianna, my wife."

It was still early, but night had long since fallen. The blinds were drawn. They were alone. As he said these last words he stepped nearer to her. She rose to her feet suddenly.

"I'm very tired," she said a little pitifully. "I must go to bed."

"Of course," he said. "I should not have kept you up so long talking about myself. You know the room. I shall follow you presently."

She was afraid he would kiss her again, but he only bowed over her hand. He was not a very graceful man, but he somehow mastered that art, for not the most finished courtier could have done it better. She acknowledged that with a singular detachment in her agitation and then with leaden feet she mounted the stair.

CHAPTER XI

NIGHT

SHE had desired no maid. The style prevailing at the moment made it possible for her to take off her dress without assistance. She stood in the room hesitant, listening. In the room below she could hear Warburton walking to and fro more rapidly than was his wont. He was impatient. What must be, must be. Her trembling hand went to her throbbing throat. With nervous fingers she unhooked her waist and then——

Downstairs Warburton walked and listened. He heard a few faint footfalls above him from time to time and then silence. He waited a little while, ages it seemed to him, and then he put his foot upon the stair. She was only half undressed, and the more beautiful in her disarray, when she heard that footfall on the stair. Warburton walked softly and slowly as if oppressed by some burden he had to carry up the stairs, yet his footsteps sounded like the crack of doom to the girl.

Gathering a loose wrapper about her, her hand drawing it across her breast, she stepped toward

the door. There was a key in the lock. Her hand went out to it. Then she stopped. What right had she? In that moment she knew what she had done. She realized the price she had to pay. She never loved Neyland as she loved him then. Had he insulted her? Why, she had been a fool. No familiarity that he could offer her was like this.

The footsteps crossed the hall. They stopped before the door. She was his. He was coming to take her. Great God! was there no recourse? His hand was on the knob. She felt it turn. She waited breathlessly, mad with terror, as he opened the door.

The lights were full on in the room. She had refrained from turning them down, deliberately. There was invitation, suggestion, in soft light that was not in brilliance. He saw her clearly as he had never seen her before, as no man had ever seen her before. His eyes lighted. Yes there was something in them. It was not exactly what she had seen in Neyland's eyes. It was a nobler feeling, but there was something in common. He stepped toward her with outstretched hands, his lip quivering, his heart beating, his face flushing, paling.

"My wife," he said, "my wife!" his voice low and passionate, and then she shrieked aloud.

"Oh, God!" she cried. "Don't come here! I can't—I didn't understand—go back—you say you love me—give me a chance—I——"

The man stopped as if petrified, rooted to the spot. His iron self-control was gone. He shook and trembled as Neyland in his weakest moment might have done.

"Christianna," he began hoarsely, his house of cards falling about him, "don't you understand, aren't you my wife, don't you love me?"

And it was the first time he had ever asked her that. Why had he waited? Whatever reply he feared, it was not that which he received, for which he was utterly unprepared.

"I think I hate you!" answered the girl hysterically. "I don't know why I did it! If you—take me—now—you will kill me! As you are strong—have mercy—I didn't know!"

Her voice rose until it was a scream. Suddenly her hands released their hold on the garments she had gathered so hastily about her. They fell away. Scarcely realizing that or anything but that she was a prisoner, a slave, a suppliant, she sank to her knees and lifted her hands toward him. In her abandonment and in her revelation she was more beautiful than ever.

John Warburton looked down at her. The cup of happiness had been dashed from his lips and the bitter cup of trembling had been proffered by the hands he loved in the very irony of fate, and he must drink of it. He looked away. He had to look away to command himself. There must have been gentle blood in that child of shame. He showed it in that hour. What would Neyland

have done? When he looked back the girl was still at his feet, her head bowed in her hands until it almost touched the floor where he stood. He could see the lovely curves of her neck and shoulders in the bridal lace and linen that she had not yet put off.

"Christianna," he said, "I will not touch you. I'm going. Your happiness alone is my only desire. I do not understand. But I would not take what you would withhold. Perhaps some day—oh, God!" he burst out and turned away. "Good-night," he added at last as if ashamed for having given way.

She looked up to see him go through the door. It was characteristic of him that he closed it gently behind him. She stared for a moment, then she rose to her feet still looking at the door, then she ran to it and turned the key. The lock clicked. Warburton standing outside with bowed head heard it. She heard him walk away. Another impulse took her. She turned the key back, flung open the door, and darted after him.

"You heard me lock the door!" she cried hysterically.

He nodded.

"I shouldn't have done that. I had no right to lock it. I behaved like a mad woman. See, here's the key. It's yours. You can come in—when you please," she faltered, turning away.

"Do you invite me to come, Christianna?" he asked quietly.

"No, I can't do that, but——"

"Until you can, then," he said, resolutely turning to his own door.

She watched him enter and close it behind him. She went back into her own room. She tore off the remains of her wedding finery and robed herself for the night. She stood by the bedside vainly attempting to kneel and pray as she had been accustomed to do from her childhood. She could not. She flung herself down on the bed at last and buried her face in the pillow and laughed and laughed and laughed, but soundlessly lest he should hear. By-and-by sleep in mercy visited her.

On the other side of the wall Warburton still fully dressed, knowing he could not sleep, opened the window in his own room that overlooked the long slope of the hills down to the quiet river beyond, flowing slowly as a moving tide in the moonlight, and sat down to fight his own battle. His soul was a still deep which ran with tremendous force. He had won a wife who was yet no wife to him. He had to win her love after marriage rather than before. These things are not conferred by the ritual of Holy Church or the benison of Reverend Father in God. Marriage was a sacrament. The outward and visible part was present. The inward, yes the spiritual—for who shall decry the sanctity of great passion?—had somehow missed him. He sat there a long time in bitter disappointment, in humiliation, in resentment.

He had never suspected or ventured to hope that his wife loved him as he loved her, yet he knew how highly she thought of him. Many marriages had been based upon such sentiments and they had been, perhaps, happier than those that began with greater passions. She was a woman. She must have known. She must have expected. There could be only one way of accounting for her aversion, for her horror. Was there some one else in her heart?

That pierced even his armour of self-restraint. Actuated by what wild temptation and determination he did not stop to analyse, he rose suddenly. He opened the door quietly and looked in the direction of her room. Had she locked the door? No. He still had the key. He saw the door was slightly open. Was this an invitation? His heart bounded for a moment. He stepped softly to the door, paused, then entered the room.

The lights were out, but the moonlight fell faintly upon her from the window. His wife was asleep, her head thrown back on the pillow. One bare arm lay outside the covers, the curious silver bracelet upon it. How small and frail and beautiful and torn she looked! What agonies she must have gone through! He bent over her. As she had said, she was his for the taking, and the temptation to take was great. The law gave her to him. What held him back, he wondered, tempted as never before?

But he resisted. He had given his word that

until she invited a closer relationship he would not presume, and so after a while he turned away and left her asleep.

Warburton was not given to prayer, but he prayed that night that he might not forget himself, that he might win her affection, that some day she might be to him what he had fondly hoped his love might cause her to be. But whatever she was or would be he would serve her and love her. Her happiness should be his supreme and only aim.

"I will gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you the less I be loved," he might have quoted in summing up his purpose if he had ever read the mighty words.

CHAPTER XII

MORNING

HER sleep had been a long time coming. She had been thoroughly exhausted by the long strain of the elaborate preparation for her wedding, and much more by the nerve-racking episode of the night before. When her nerves had become somewhat quieted her sleep had almost developed into a lethargy. The sun was already high in the heavens when its light, streaming through the unshuttered windows, at last awakened her. She opened her eyes slowly—she was lying on her side facing the window—and stared about the room in bewilderment. That morning she did not awaken quickly, alertly, in full possession of her faculties as was her wont. The deep obsession of her slumber was still upon her. The room was utterly unfamiliar to her. She gazed about it wonderingly. What could it mean?

Ah! Suddenly there came to her, with the illuminating vividness of a lightning flash, the consciousness that she was a married woman, that she was no longer Chrissey de Selden. The

thought terrified her. What had happened? Was she——?

She held her breath to listen. Not a sound came through the open window. It was an entirely windless morning. Not the gentlest air soughed through the pines outside. Save for the beat of her own heart there was no sound within. She listened for a breathing on the pillow next her own. She heard nothing. She began to remember. She turned her head quickly—thank God, she was alone!

She lay staring at the untouched pillow by her while it all came back to her. On the bureau across the room stood a little gilt boudoir clock. She looked at it. The hands pointed to nine. After most nights in her season she would not have thought of getting up at such an hour, but this morning it was different. It came to her suddenly that he might come in at any time. It would be his right. The thought moved her to instant action. She sprang out of the bed and not waiting for her slippers ran swiftly to the door. She looked across the hall to the room, where she fancied he had slept. She would have been appalled if she had realized that he had not closed his eyes during the night.

There was no key in her own door. What did it mean? She remembered that she had given it to him, the sign of an authority and a privilege he had not claimed or ventured to exercise. Lacking the key there was no way of securing her

door, and yet she could not dress without it. She stood listening. There was no sound in the hall; none that she could detect came from the room opposite. All was still. She could not even hear the servants. She forgot for the moment that their part of the house was far removed from her room, and the quiet filled her with sudden terror. It was ominous, as if destiny, fate, what you will, lurked in the silence on every hand to seize her.

In panic she swung to her door and as she did so something fell from it. She checked herself, looked down a moment to see the key on the floor of the hall. He had come back evidently and fearing to awaken her had placed the key gently in its socket on the outside of the door. She felt no gratitude toward him for that or for his forbearance. She did not seem capable of it.

The possibilities of the situation were so horrible to her that she could think of nothing else. She stooped and seized the key. She had done her part. She had given it to him. He had returned it. Henceforth he need not be considered. She thrust it in the keyhole on the inside and turned the lock. Then she threw up her hands with a gesture that indicated safety, relief unspeakable. And yet any ordinary man could have broken the lock in a minute,—John Warburton easily! Some men would have done so. If he had been there Warburton might have tried it.

His vigil, his long watch through the night, alone in his room, with the woman he loved asleep

as it were under his hand and his for the taking, had driven him nearly frantic. He had fled temptation. When he put the key in the door very early that morning and turned away he had done the hardest and bravest thing of his brave hard life had she but known it.

The key represented to her not so much a sacrifice as the abdication of his right. She read into it things perhaps it did not connote and that he did not intend to express. At any rate it was safe now for her to dress. Her trunks had been put in her room and opened. A trousseau usually contains little that is not new, even though she had obeyed the pretty couplet that says a bride must wear

Something old and something new,
Something borrowed, something blue—

in her wedding attire. Moved by what reasons she could not explain—she found herself often in that mental plight—she had directed her maid to include in the trunks one or two dresses that she had worn. She rummaged through the hangers until she found the oldest of them. That she would wear. She had a feeling that it was associated with her girlhood and more appropriate than those she had prepared for her marriage—she had almost said martyrdom!

Greatly refreshed by her bath, clothed, and if not in her right mind at least as nearly so as one

could be in her circumstances, she made ready to descend the stair. She remembered that night she had come down the great stair in the New York house when he had told her— Why had she not broken it off then, when she had the opportunity? Would he be waiting for her at the foot of the stair this time? What would he say or do? He had not kissed her then. He had never kissed her since their engagement except that one time last night. She shrank from the meeting. She found herself wondering what would have happened if Neyland had been waiting for her below. She blushed scarlet at thoughts that rushed into her mind at which she had the grace to be ashamed and yet which she did not strive to drive away. Neyland—Warburton! She decided she could not go down the stair to meet Warburton without finding out something.

She stepped over to the wall and put her finger on the bell, but she did not press it. It would be cowardly so to do. She must go down that stair. She must meet her husband. He was her husband even though only in name. The De Selden blood had never shirked responsibility, she thought proudly, quite oblivious to what she had shirked the night before. She opened the door and stepped into the hall. Glancing through the door of her husband's room she discovered he was not there and she noted that the bed had not been slept in. That amazed her but did not move her in any other way. In fact, nothing that Warbur-

ton could have done could have changed her present mood, which was one of complete defiance. She had been helpless the night before. She had appealed to his mercy. In the broad light of day it was different. She came down the stair rapidly and therefore ungracefully, not as she had descended before. The heels of her slippers rang a tapping defiance as she came. The little bravado went for naught. There was no one in the great hall, but the fire of logs on the hearth gave her a sense of life and human companionship.

She touched the bell and the butler presented himself. He said gravely:

"Mr. Warburton got up early and has gone out shooting. He begs you to excuse him and he hopes to be back for dinner."

That wondrous abnegation, that supremely courteous withdrawal, after her actions of the night before had convinced him of his unwelcome presence, might have touched her. She felt only relief as she nodded her head to the man.

"Your breakfast is served, madam," he continued, opening the door into the cozy little dining room of the lodge.

She spent a long and lonesome day. At first she thought of having one of the women servants up to her room to unpack her trunks, but that seemed to give a permanence and finality to the situation which she could scarcely bring herself to regard as more than temporary and transient. She wandered about the house undecidedly. She

played a little. She could not lift her lovely voice in song, not even in sad song befitted to her mood. She tried to read. She could not fix her attention on the book. There was no book, however interesting, however exciting, however true to life, that could in any way present a situation so absorbing as her own.

She hated to sit and think because when she did so she thought of Neyland. There was a certain loyalty in her heart that made her ashamed of that, and yet she could not help it. Why did she have such a feeling? She thought that life with a man she loved, whatever his character, whatever his degradation, whatever unhappiness of circumstances it could bring, could not be worse than this, therefore she hated Warburton. She did not admit it, perhaps she did not realize it, but if he had struck her down and mastered her like a cave-man or a barbarian she might have kissed his hands. As it was, his very forbearance and restraint won only her contempt, then. And yet she was grateful to him for that consideration.

There was no consistency in her thoughts. How could there be in such a situation? Ordinarily she was a resourceful woman and could have been quite happy alone, but not then. At last, after playing with a luncheon, she ordered the car and drove over the hills and far away. There was a spice of excitement in the drive, too, because she might run across her husband in his hunting. She wanted that, and she did not want it. She

craved to have it out, to settle things finally, and then she feared the trial lest she might not succeed.

She was driven by the wind of her passion and tossed. After a while she dispossessed the chauffeur and took the wheel of the big powerful motor and drove it madly over the roads until the man ventured to remonstrate with her. It was six o'clock when she got back to the house. No, her husband had not yet returned. The butler said dinner would be ready at seven and madam would have time to dress for that function. He seemed to take it as a matter of course that she would, but she was firmly resolved not to do so. She would not make herself beautiful. She did not belong to Warburton in her heart and he should not——

The telephone bell rang. It was the butler's business to answer, but as she was nearest to it she picked up the instrument herself—anything for occupation, distraction. The railroad agent at Suffern was on the other end of the wire.

"Is Mr. Warburton there?"

"No. What is it?"

"I have an important telegram for him. Will he be in soon?"

"I think so. He is expected any moment. I am Mrs. Warburton, can't you give me the message?"

"By no means," came the quick reply. "I mean—I beg your pardon—er—Mr. Warburton

gave us strict orders to deliver telegrams to him personally and——”

“I quite understand,” she replied. “It is of no consequence. I will tell him so soon as he comes in.”

“Thank you,” said the agent. “And you may tell him that we have a special train on the siding, which I have ventured to make up in case he needs it.”

“Is it so important as that?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

She hung up the receiver and turned to the man.

“You heard? There is a telegram at Suffern for Mr. Warburton. Tell him to call up the agent so soon as he comes in. He would not give it to me.”

She turned and went up to her room, not to change her dress, but because she did not want to meet her husband until dinner was served. The servants would be there then and there would be no possibility of explanations or discussions. Those would have to come later. So she sat down by the window and stared out across the pine trees and down the mountain toward the river cold and grey in the twilight,—cold and grey like her life in spite of the hot blood that throbbed in her veins and the fierce beat of her imprisoned heart.

Presently Warburton came in. His step was heavy and strong. It rang determinedly on the floor below. She glanced at the clock. It was nearly seven. She would go down now lest he

catch her in her room. She opened the door and as she did so she heard him call the agent on the telephone. . . . She went rapidly along the hall and was half way down the stair when his voice stopped her.

"Good God!" exclaimed Warburton at the telephone. "When did the message come?"

"About an hour ago, sir."

"Repeat it."

There was a pause. She stopped on the stair, but he was so much engrossed in the message that he did not hear her and he was not aware that she was there.

"Stricken, dying!" he gasped. "I shall require a special train at once."

She remembered that the agent had said one was ready and she knew his answer.

"Good," said her husband. "I shall be down in ten minutes with Mrs. Warburton. I shall see that your foresight is rewarded," he continued.

Warburton hung up the receiver, turned to the stair and, discovering her, stopped and stared at her in dismay.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Christianna," he began gravely—the news he had to communicate had shocked and sobered him, but his pulses were dancing and his heart throbbing as he saw her there. If she had thought to create an unfavourable impression by a dress that he had seen many times she had failed, for as it happened

he loved her in the rich wine colour of that familiar suit that so well became her dark beauty. If she had loved him he would have run toward her and taken her in his arms and given her the comfort and support of his sympathy and presence but she had erected a barrier between them which he had sworn during that long day alone in the woods that he would not attempt to batter down or overleap. Her own hands must open the way. And so he stood rigid, erect. She did not wish to admit how powerful and manly he was in that rough hunting suit, his gun in hand, but she had to recognize it. He looked like a conquerer and she felt helpless before him. His voice was cold and measured as usual.

"Christianna, prepare yourself."

"Oh, what is it?"

"Your mother has been suddenly stricken. She is ill, dying."

Chrissey de Selden swayed on the stair.

"Dodson," said Warburton, "look to your mistress."

The butler sprang to assist her. Somehow or other she managed to descend the stair and sink into a chair.

"The agent has a special train ready. Dodson have the motor brought around at once. Tell the maid to get some of Mrs. Warburton's things together. I will take off these clothes in a moment. Courage," he said stepping toward the stair.

Unconsciously she shrank away a little.

"Have no fear," he added with a double meaning which she was quick to see, "your mother is still alive and is asking for you. I'll get you there as quickly as steam can carry you. Dodson, telephone and have the motor yacht meet us at Hoboken and the car at the Columbia Yacht Club landing without fail," he continued to the butler. "We shall be there in less than an hour."

"Very good, sir."

"Mrs. Hamil," he said to the housekeeper, "pray assist Mrs. Warburton to pack a few things and make ready for a return to the city; her mother is seriously ill."

With that he was gone. Later they sat in the tonneau of the car side by side as before. He did not offer to touch her and she did not wish to touch him. When they reached the station the agent gave them a copy of the telegram and a second telegram in answer to Warburton's wire, which said there was no change but that they must hurry. She was so dazed and shocked by the news that she could not think of anything else, yet in the midst of her grief and anxiety for her mother a selfish thought would obtrude itself. So long as her mother lived there was someone to whom to go who would sympathize, who would understand. If her mother died she would be alone in the world, alone with Warburton, more alone than ever. When she prayed, as she did in that long silent ride in the swaying, hurtling train dragged over

the rails, which had been cleared for the passage of the special, at tremendous speed, she could not but wonder whether she was praying for herself or for her mother, that all might be well.

BOOK III
THE "STILL-VEXED BERMOUTHES"

CHAPTER XIII

ONCE MORE THE SEA

CHRISSEY Warburton sat on the upper deck of the *Bermudian* and stared indifferently at the swiftly passing shores of Staten Island covered with leafless trees standing bleak and bare in the cold sunshine of December. The sharp wind of the bitter morning scarcely served to bring a touch of color to her pale and wasted cheeks. She was dressed in sables and well wrapped in steamer rugs.

Her bonnet, as would her dress had it been visible, indicated deep mourning. An hour ago she had bade her husband farewell. Much water had flowed under the bridge since that October night when she had been afraid. They had reached home after a mad ride in train, in motor boat, in automobile, just in time for the girl, surely a woman now, to receive her mother's blessing, to hear her last faint whispered words. Strangely enough these words had been addressed to John Warburton.

"We were left to you by my husband, John—when Chrissey was a little baby and now—I leave

her to you, again," she faltered in a low whisper. "You will be good to her?"

John Warburton, who could scarcely trust himself to speak in view of all the emotions that filled his heart, nodded his head.

"I know," said Mrs. de Selden smiling up at him, and the rest was silence.

It had come so suddenly, so overwhelmingly, that the daughter did not give way to the natural outburst of grief that might have been expected. Warburton felt very tender toward her. She looked so small and broken and ill. In spite of her repulsion his heart was filled with love for her. He would fain have taken her in his arms and comforted her as though she had been a tired child, but she would have none of it. Without bending her head she walked quietly from the room and not until she had sought her own chamber, the one that she had occupied as a girl and as a young woman, not the room that he had prepared for her when alterations had been made before the marriage, did she break down. She barely managed to support herself and keep on her feet until after the funeral.

It was from the same church from which she had been married a few days before and, as at that time, she walked down the aisle on the arm of John Warburton again. How different was her position! Ages seemed to have rolled between. She hated herself because she could not love John Warburton. His manner had been unexception-

able. No one could have shown more delicacy than he. The man was a miracle. He was too perfect for her comprehension. It seemed to her as if his every word, his every action were calling attention to the fact that no man on earth could have behaved better. His course was absolutely flawless.

Well, it was not until they entered the great house after the funeral and confronted each other in the drawing-room so lately tenanted by the dead whose presence was still felt, that the wife who was no wife gave way.

"Christianna," began the husband—speaking then was one of the few mistakes he had made since God—was it God?—had joined them together—"I desire to indulge you in all things but we must come to some understanding and——"

"Not now," cried the woman hysterically.

She did not wait for his answer for she fainted dead away. Perhaps she read more in his request than he intended. At any rate, the decision was perforce postponed for when she recovered consciousness she was violently ill. Her marriage, her realization of what it meant, the deadly fear of her husband, her recognition that she loved Neyland, the shame of that acknowledgment, the feeling that she could never belong to her husband, the awful shock of her mother's sudden death, the consciousness that she was alone in the house, in the world, with a man whom she all but hated, all combined to crush her.

Why had Warburton not taken her as men have taken women since time and the world began? Even as the violent sometimes take the kingdom of heaven? Even in that he had failed to measure up to the power she had thought was in him. Inconsistently she would have hated him more if he had done so and if she had had a weapon she would have struck him to the heart with it if he had made such an attempt, and yet unconsciously she hated him more because he had not done so. She feared him without realizing that sometimes the fear of a husband is the beginning of wisdom—for a wife.

All this had strained her nerves to the breaking point. She had denied herself to everyone except Rose Tayloe, who had been constancy and devotion itself. Her physician had aided her in that desire. She must have absolute rest. Being her husband, of course Warburton must have access to her chamber. Morning and evening he came to see her, but his visits were brief and colourless. She wished that he would not obtrude himself upon her, and her desire was but too apparent. Nevertheless, he would come if only for appearance sake, he told himself, although really because he hungered for the sight of the small pale face, the delicate head upon the white linen of the pillow in the great bed which knew him not. Although he was not insensible that she was happier when he was not there, he came.

There was a limit even to his powers. He

thought that some day he would kill her without mercy unless— For the rest he compassed her with sweet observances and hoped that in some way he might keep her true.

One day after she had grown a little better Rose Tayloe came in. She was bursting with news. Great tidings trembled on her lips. She could hardly speak softly and gently about them. The Duke, manfully accepting his defeat so far as Miss de Selden was concerned, had transferred his heart to Rose Tayloe and had laid the ducal coronet of the ancient house of Attavanti at her feet.

"Of course," said Rose apologetically, "he is a little smaller than I am but that doesn't make so much difference in a Duke, does it?"

"No," whispered the other woman, patting her friend's hand tenderly, "nothing makes any difference where there is love."

"I suppose I ought to be furiously jealous of you," said Rose, "because he did love you first and if you hadn't turned him down I'd never have got him."

The other girl bent over her friend and kissed her, and Chrissey's brow was wet with one of Rose's rare tears.

"You need not be in the least afraid," she said softly. "He never really cared for me even when he was making love to me, I often caught him looking at you. If I had been fond of him I should have resented it bitterly."

"Yes, he said he couldn't decide between us," answered the other girl, greatly pleased, "and that he was glad that fortune had finally eliminated you and—er—opened his eyes to—er—my—well, you know what a man would say."

"Of course."

"And about that duel, he said he fought Mr. Neyland for the honour of womankind. He is a man of very high ideals and it was as much for me as for any one."

"I'm sure he loves you as you ought to be loved, Rose."

"Well, it's a comfort to hear you say that," said Rose with more relief in her voice than she fancied, "because I am really very fond of him. He is adorable."

"That's what I mean," whispered Chrissey. "If there is love things may be wrong but they will not be so wrong as they will be without any——"

Rose Tayloe was quick witted and a close observer. She read aright the look in her friend's face and although Chrissey Warburton would have died rather than betray her secret, in her weakness her guard was down. Rose Tayloe was her oldest friend. She could say things which no one else could say.

"Chrissey," she cried, "you don't mean——?"

The woman hid her face in her hands.

"I didn't mean to tell you," she said at last, "but marriage without love——"

She stopped; it was inexpressible. For all her keenness the other girl did not fully understand.

"But Mr. Warburton is so——"

"He is perfection itself," admitted the wife, "and that makes me hate——"

"Not your husband!"

"No, not exactly, but my situation, the more. If you can't marry the man you love you would better die than marry the man you don't."

"It's Mr. Neyland, I suppose."

"I—I—don't love my husband and I wish I were in my mother's place," evasively answered the woman on the bed, averting her face. "If you don't love the Duke more than everything under heaven, don't marry him. You don't realize what it means."

"But I do love him and I shall marry him."

"I pray God that you will be happier than I have been."

"But you're not yourself now, Chris, dear. You're overwrought, unstrung. Your poor mother's death——"

"It was just the same before she died. I think I hate him."

"Was he unkind to you?" asked the other shocked at this terrible revelation.

"He left me alone. If he had only beaten me I might have hated him still, but I would have respected him."

"I think it was noble of him. Surely he can win your love."

"Love!" burst from the woman on the bed and in the violence of her emotion she sat up and Rose noticed with a heart pang how frail she looked and ill. It is not until we arise from the sick bed that people see what ravages have been wrought in us by our illnesses. "How could I love him when my heart is filled with someone else?"

"It is true then?"

"Yes."

"But he doesn't compare with——"

"What difference does that make? I know how weak he is. I know his career, and I know that I love him. I'd rather be his slave, even his dog, than John Warburton's wife."

Women can speak to each other voicelessly. They need no words. Rose Tayloe being the stronger sat down on the bed and gathered her frailer, slighter sister to her breast. They were the same age but she held her almost as a mother might a child.

"It will all come right, dear Chris," she whispered.

"It's wrong of me to have told you this," said the woman at last. "It's disloyal and—but I owe him nothing, nothing. I suppose some day I will get used to the idea and be like other women but not now. He comes in every morning and every evening and he looks at me so strangely I am afraid to get well."

Actuated by the very highest motives Rose

Tayloe told her father of the interview. If there was a man on earth for whom John Warburton had a deep and abiding respect and even affection it was for old Colonel Tayloe. He would allow the Colonel to say things to him that no one else could attempt. The old man was tact and discretion itself.

"Warburton," he said, choosing his time, "you ought to get your wife away for a little while."

"I'll take her anywhere in the world," said Warburton.

"No," said the Colonel quietly, "that is not exactly what I mean. You ought to send her some place where she can be alone to think things out."

"What do you mean?"

"My dear boy,"—and there was no one on earth who would dare address Warburton like that save the Colonel—"I am old enough to—ah—be your father. I don't mean anything and I don't intend to say anything further except that sometimes it is well for a man and wife to be separated for a little, to give the woman time to adjust her thoughts, and the man too. You must not get angry. I have only your happiness at heart. There is no other man on earth to whom I would say what I have."

"And there is no other man," said Warburton grimly, "to whom I would allow the privilege."

"The wedding, the shock of her mother's death

in her nervous condition, she could not stand it. A sea voyage would be well. I suggest that you arrange to send her down to Bermuda. It is lovely there now and you will be within easy reach if she needs you."

"If I take your advice at all I should take it all," said Warburton quietly. "I'll have the yacht put in commission."

"No, I don't believe I'd do that."

"What then?"

"Let her go down on the steamer with her maid. She won't care to go to a hotel but there are cottages to be had. Rose and I know of one overlooking Hamilton Harbour not far from the Belmont. It is quite private. It has every comfort and convenience. There are extensive grounds attached to it. I remember the long row of oleanders that border the drive. It is a heavenly place. You can send servants down ahead so that she will have every comfort. She will be glad to be alone, she can rest and think things out, and she can adjust herself to her new relations. You understand?"

"I do."

"I will say no more then, except to wish you the happiness that I know you deserve and I am sure you will win."

The old man did not wait for any answer.

"By the way," he continued, "you know the engagement between Rose and the Duke is announced?"

"Is she marrying him because he is a Duke or does she love him?"

From another man or under other circumstances Colonel Tayloe would have resented that query. He noticed the bitterness in Warburton's voice.

"I asked her that after the Duke approached me. She told me that she loved him and I could see from her voice and look that it was true."

"And he?"

"He seems devotion itself and I believe he is."

"It's all right then."

It was singular how his view coincided with that of his wife, if either had but known it, on that raw December morning which found Chrissey Warburton outward bound.

CHAPTER XIV

"THE POSY OF A RING"

As the *Bermudian* made her southing the rough raw weather of the first day gave place to the smoother seas and balmy airs of the semi-tropic waters. Her furs discarded for lighter wraps and those thrown upon her chair, Chrissey Warburton sat on the deck alone plunged in reverie. With each traversed league of ocean realities grew less and imaginations grew greater.

She had left Warburton behind and although she was not going to meet Neyland he was somehow before. For the first time since she had received the bracelet which she had so constantly worn, the uninterrupted luxury of imagination with which she dwelt upon Neyland suddenly connected him with the little bauble that circled her arm outside the long black glove, which enhanced the silver and the jewels set therein.

She wondered idly if he had sent it, what it meant. Now that he had sent it had never before occurred to her because among her many wedding gifts one of the most costly and beautiful had borne his card. If, therefore, she reasoned still

languidly and yet with a slightly growing interest, he had sent the large and acknowledged gift to cover the small and unadmitted one it would only be because the latter was the more important. That its importance could not lie in its intrinsic value she at once recognized, postulating, as all adventurous thinkers, the correctness of her hypothesis until it had been disproved. She had not accumulated the wealthy woman's usual stock of beautiful jewels without learning something of their quality and value and she realized that even by the most extravagant estimate the little bracelet could scarcely have cost fifty dollars. Therefore the importance of the bracelet must lie in something else. What?

Following this turn of thought she slipped it off her arm and gave it a very close and careful inspection. There were thirteen stones of all colours and cuttings embedded in the narrow band of roughly hammered silver, finished with that soft glaze which is known as “butler.” She identified seven of them without difficulty. Turning the narrow ellipse over and over, looking at the gems again and again, she finally held it motionless by chance with the longer axis vertical. One or the other end of that axis was the top, she decided.

In the position in which she held it she noticed that at the top, if it were so, was a delicate brownish-green stone cut *cabochon*. The brown and the green were interwoven, blending. She had

not the least idea what it was. The next stone on the right, which would be the way a person would read, was easily identifiable. She had seen too many pieces of that deep rich blue stone not to recognize lapis lazuli. She breathed the word aloud and the combination of liquids struck her ear. The "L" sound was prominent in her mind. The next stone was also easy. It was a beautiful little Hungarian opal. Its translucent fires seemed fairly to clamour some silent message to her, and again the emphasis on the first syllable brought the vowel to her mind. She associated it with the predominant note of the lapis lazuli and she had "L-O." The next inset was a clear translucent brownish stone shot with fine hair lines. She could make nothing of it. She had never seen anything like it although it had some resemblance to an agate. But the fourth stone in the succession was plain. It had the deep rich green of an emerald. "L-O-something-E"—Love, of course!

She nearly dropped the bracelet when she stumbled upon this! Whatever that brown stone with the little hair lines might be it certainly must stand for "V." Love! Neyland? Who else would dare send her such a message? Eagerly she continued the examination. The next stone was a bit of peculiar looking jade, not milky but a deeper green than that to which she was accustomed, yet unmistakably jade. "J"! What could that mean?

To identify the seventh stone was easy. It was a fragment of highly polished onyx. Was there any law by which “J” and “Y” were interchangeable? In some languages, yes, but not in English. If that “J” had been “Y” she would have been sure, indeed she was almost certain, the three stones spelled “Y-O-U.” “L-O-V-E-Y-O-U,” although she had no idea what was the name of the eighth stone, a little speck of greenish yellow. If her deductions were correct the first stone to which she looked back must be something that began with “I,” and behold, she had a sentence, “I-L-O-V-E-Y-O-U,” I love you!

She was progressing. With renewed zest and growing excitement she identified the ninth stone instantly. It was a sparkling piece of purple amethyst. “A.” She could make nothing of the next two, the tenth and the eleventh, one a yellowish green stone and the other a brilliant, transparent blue one. The twelfth stone flashed redly before her vision. It was not a ruby but it belonged to the family. “R”—Richard! The last stone came into her view as she completed her inspection of the circlet. This jewel showed a bit of white colour with flecks of green in it. She could not identify it in any way but it must be something that began with “N.” “R-N” Richard Neyland!

Greatly excited she sent one of the deck stewards for her maid and had her bring a pencil and paper from their cabin. She wrote thirteen numbers

down on the paper and under each number she put the letters of which she was positive, leaving those which she could not identify blank and this was the result.

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13.
— L O — E J O — A — — R —

Allowing her imagination to supply stones and letters which she did not know, she was morally certain that the message of the bracelet was "I love you" followed by three letters of which she could make nothing from the first "A" and then the letter "R" and another unknown. When she reached this conclusion she lifted the bracelet to her lips and kissed it. By chance or selection she touched it at the piece of red stone which stood for his name.

She had been carelessly indifferent as to when she should arrive or what she should do when she reached the Bermudas. She had gone principally because it removed her from daily contact with Warburton upon whose forbearance she was not sure that she could count indefinitely. Now she was on fire to land. Her first visit would be to the best jewellers in Hamilton, to whom she would submit the bracelet in order to learn the names of the missing stones and complete the resolving of the riddle of the speaking circlet. Although she was certain she had the purport of the message, she would not be satisfied until every content in

the enigma was her own. It was a different woman who stood on the deck as the steamer swept slowly through the narrow passes between the little islands so close at hand that one might almost have leaped to the shore as the *Bermudian* entered the harbour.

[Servants were waiting her at the dock, another evidence of Warburton's thoughtful care for her, which now filled her with irritation. The house he had rented for her at Colonel Tayloe's suggestion was over in Warwick beyond the Belmont Hotel. It was a drive of several miles around the end of the harbour, but before she took it she directed the man to drive her to the leading jeweller's shop in the town. She asked to see the proprietor and was ushered into a private office occupied by an elderly man, who proved to be something of a lapidary. She handed the bracelet to him with her questions, waiting with ill-concealed impatience while he examined it critically.

“Some of the stones I know,” she said, “but others are strange to me. That one, for instance, at the top of the bracelet.”

“That brownish green stone,” said the jeweller, “is a piece of idocrase.”

“Ah!” she exclaimed repeating the word and emphasizing the vowel. “I know the next two, lapis lazuli and opal.”

“Yes, and the fourth stone with the delicate filaments of hornblende is a bit of rock crystal.”

"Is there any other name for it?"

"Yes, it is popularly known as Venus-hair-stone."

"I see," she said smiling at this confirmation of her supposition. "The next stone is one of the emerald variety is it not?"

"An emeralite, madam."

"And the sixth?"

"Jade."

"Has it any other name?"

The old man thought deeply.

"I seem to remember that this particular variety is called in Chinese 'Yu.'"

"Exactly. And the next is onyx."

"Certainly. The eighth stone, this bit of greenish yellow, I am in some doubt about. I shall have to investigate that further. The ninth, however, is easy. It is an amethyst and the next one following is an epidote and this piece of sparkling blue is called iolite. The red stone is of course a rubellite, and the last one,"—he stopped and thought—"the name escapes me."

"Perhaps I can give you a clue."

"Everything is helpful, madam. What do you suggest?"

"Something that begins with 'N.'"

"Nephrite, of course," he said. "Now we have them all except this one." He laid his hand on a greenish yellow stone, the eighth in the circle. "Perhaps you can give me some clue to that."

“I think it is something that begins with ‘U,’” she said quickly.

He thought deeply but his memory did not serve him.

“If madam would leave the bracelet with me I would search and make sure.”

“I couldn’t do that,” she answered.

“Well, I can remember the stone and—you are stopping at the Hamilton?”

“No. I have engaged ‘Whileaway Villa.’”

“Oh, indeed I know it well. It is in Warwick over beyond the Belmont and you are Mrs. John Warburton?”

“I am.”

The old man bowed, drew a pad and pencil toward him and wrote rapidly a description of the stone.

“I shall send you the name of it this afternoon, I am sure.” A promise which he fulfilled later, informing her that the missing stone was a piece of Uthahite.

“Thank you. Since you are writing will you write down the names of the first stone, idocrase, was it not, and the others that you have identified?”

“I will write them all down,” he said taking the bracelet and suiting the action to the word.

As he wrote the words the acrostic was as plain to him as it was to her, but he was an old man and a discreet. She was Mrs. John Warburton. He knew all about her. The leasing of “Whileaway” had been a subject of great insular com-

ment. "R" and "N" were certainly not the initials of her husband. No woman would be likely to send such a bracelet as that. Here was mystery, perhaps scandal. It was fortunate she had fallen into the hands of a gentleman. He handed the list to her with the bracelet.

"To what extent am I indebted to you, sir, for your courtesy?"

"To no extent, madam. It was a pleasure to serve you and a privilege to handle so unique and beautiful a piece of work."

"And I accept your gracious service in the same spirit in which it is offered, sir. I can rely on your discretion?"

"Assuredly, madam."

She took the paper and the bracelet and re-entered her carriage. She had never been in Bermuda before, and there was much on every hand to delight the eye of even the jaded traveller. The dazzling white coral road bordered by low white walls that fairly blazed with light, the tall palms, the broad-leaved banana trees, the gorgeous red blossoms of the hibiscus mingling with huge oleanders the size of trees, sometimes reaching their branches over the road and covering all with rare pink splendour. But she had eyes for nothing but the bracelet.

The houses, spotlessly clean, showing every variety of delicate colour on their lime-washed coral walls, groups of tourists in their gay equipages, the jaunty soldiers, the smiling negroes,

she passed them all by as an idle dream. Her eyes were fixed upon the paper. “I love you,” she read and then these three mysterious letters “A” “E” “I” followed by “R. N.”

It was outrageous. It was almost an insult that he should have sent such a message to her on her wedding day. It was like that invasion of her modesty at Sorrento which she had resented so fiercely. The fragrance of the oleanders brought back that night. She made excuses for him now. If she had only understood then that he had not been himself, that it was not the real man who had laid impious hands upon her. If she had only waited, if she had not been so impatient, if, if——

At last her carriage was rolled down the long avenue of oleanders to the house which Warburton had rented for her, to which he had sent her own servants, which showed on every hand his prescient forethought and constant care for her. A man with the weight of financial policies of the world upon his shoulders thinking about her. Her only recognition of it was resentment.

She went to her room directly and dismissing her maid threw herself face downward on the bed, her cheek upon her arm, the hard metal of the bracelet pressed into the soft flesh as if she would fain brand the message upon her cheek. She had resented another touch as a brand and lo, here she was almost striving to repeat it. Her body shook and burned. There was no doubt about

it. No conventional concealment could hide it. She loved Neyland, Neyland, only he. And she hated Warburton.

Was there any way to freedom? She would be alone here for some time. She could think it over. She must have happiness. Maybe she could not have happiness even with Neyland. What of that? She would at least have him and he would have her. She hid her face in her hands. As she lay there the sky was suddenly overcast, the rains descended, the winds blew and beat upon the house. It did not move for it was founded upon rock. The house of her affection was founded upon the sands. Rain was falling upon it. The wind was blowing about it. It trembled on its foundations.

CHAPTER XV

"A-E-I"

SHE retired early and for the second time in many years neglected her nightly petitions, the first occasion having been on her wedding night. She was acutely conscious of her lack but because of the feelings that rioted in her breast she could not approach her God.

The next few days passed mechanically. She denied herself to all visitors. The island aristocracy was anxious to pay attention to the young wife of the great money magnate. Some of her American friends and acquaintances were stopping at the Hamilton, the Princess, or the Belmont. They called at once. She would see no one.

She sat for long hours on the broad veranda looking out over the exquisite harbour. It did not seem to her that for beauty and charm, for blueness of sea, for purity of air, for greenness of shore, for variety of colour, the equal of that islet dotted arm of the sea existed anywhere on earth. She never tired of following the great sweep of coast line from the navy yard far away upon the rocky point, with its great grey ships of war

hard by, to the low hills opposite. The light of it, the colour of it, the sparkle of it, and the life of it entranced her.

She was content to sit and gaze at it and play with the bracelet and whisper its message to her heart and wonder what the three mysterious letters meant. It was more beautiful than the bay of Naples and Sorrento, she decided, but he was not here as he had been there. Yet he spoke to her across all these leagues of sea. The bitterness of the recollection faded. He had been about to take her into his arms and she would have welcomed him now.

"Madam," said Dodson, the grave and dignified old butler, breaking in upon her reverie, "there is a gentleman in the hall who asks to see you."

Could it be Richard Neyland? She rose to her feet and stood trembling, steadying herself by the chair, the colour flooding her cheek.

"Who is it?"

"He did not give me his name, madam, he said that he was a Priest of the Church."

The light went out of her eyes. Her heart sank. She sat down again.

"Did you tell him I wish to see no one?"

"Yes, madam. But he said he was not calling upon you socially but upon a matter of pressing importance and he begs you to accord him the honour of a brief interview."

She had seen no one, but a Priest of the Church was different. She had been all her life a devout

Churchwoman. She needed the Church now in the turmoil through which she was passing. Perhaps it would be well to see this man. He might be one to whom she could go if she should decide that she wanted other counsel than her affections.

“Tell him I will see him.”

“In the drawing-room, madam?”

“Here. And see that we are not disturbed.”

In a few moments the visitor was announced.

“Father Stewart-Smith,” said the butler.

Mrs. Warburton had risen to receive him. She saw a lean old man well past sixty, brown of face and weather-beaten, with a fringe of white hair around his bald head. He had a hooked nose, homely but aristocratic. He looked at her through large spectacles behind which blue eyes that had not lost the fire of youth twinkled merrily. His clean-shaven face showed a firm mouth between finely chiselled lips. There was a little upturn of the curves that modified the firmness with a touch of genial humour. He was thin and spare and from beneath his round collar fell the *rabat* of a Roman Priest although English and Anglican Church were written all over him—unmistakably so.

He bowed over her extended hand with all the grace of a courtier of the old régime.

“Will you be seated, Father Stewart-Smith?” she said as the butler placed a chair for him and at a nod from his mistress withdrew.

"You may call me, Father Smith if you will," said the old man. "Everybody in the islands does; although I was born with that hyphenated name and therefore have it on my cards, no one ever uses it. You are Mrs. John Warburton?"

"I am. You have matters of importance you wish to present to me?"

"Only matters of importance would warrant me in insisting upon your seeing me in opposition to your desires and for that I ask your pardon."

"I grant it freely."

There was something so infectiously pleasant in the gentle manner of this aged servant of God, with its exquisite flavour of old world aristocracy commingled with the eternal democracy of the Church, that she would have forgiven him anything.

"I understand that you have suffered a great loss, the greatest perhaps," he went on bowing his acknowledgments, "and that you have come here for rest."

There was a little surprise in her look, which he was quick enough to recognise.

"You see we get the New York papers here," he went on, "and the doings of the great are set down therein with minute particularity. Well, you have come to the right place. Naturally this is as near heaven as any spot on earth could be. I can't say quite as much of it spiritually, I regret, but the people are a good sort after all and I am glad to minister to them."

“I do not see how they could fail to be under your leadership.”

And there was a genuine ring in her voice that pleased the old man.

“You are very good,” he said. “With the help of God I do what I can. And it is about that I have come to speak to you. We know that all Americans are rich,” he laughed, “and we know that the wife of John Warburton is the richest of all. Frankly, madam, I want help. I might go about it indirectly. I might make my plea at the end of my call instead of at the beginning but I prefer to reverse the usual custom. I am a plain, blunt old man. If my call should be distasteful to you now that you know my errand and you are not disposed to help me, it will be a simple matter to say so and I shall go without troubling you further.”

He rose and bowed before her ready to make good his words at the slightest sign that it would please her.

“Sit down, Father Smith,” she said. “Tell me in what way you want help.”

“Before I do that,” he answered, resuming his chair, “may I venture to point out that when I ask help I also bring it.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You are alone here in deep grief,” his hand went out in graceful gesture toward her black dress. “That would tell me, had I not known, and your face as well. Pardon the liberty but I am a Priest of your own faith.”

"Speak on," said the woman.

"It is not good for you to be alone."

"Society," she began.

"I do not speak of society, but of occupation. My little church is back yonder in the valley. I shall hope to see you at God's board where I dispense His hospitality on His day."

She bowed.

"We need so much. I will give you in return opportunities to do things, to see where your money goes, to spend it yourself. Almost everyone likes that. I will only suggest and you will be happier if you have something to do. You know," he went on, not giving her time to answer and looking far away across the harbour, "sometimes I am heretic enough to wonder whether the primal curse was much of a curse after all. I really think it was a blessing. The curses of men must differ from the curses of God. There must be benedictions in His. To work, to be of some use,"—he stopped. "But it is Saturday and I must not preach until tomorrow. You have heard me, Mrs. Warburton, will you come and see?"

"I will and I will help."

"Thank you."

"No, the thanks are due from me to you. Meanwhile?"

"I want nothing now. Not until you have examined and your own judgment has decided. I shall see you at church tomorrow."

“Tomorrow,” she said. “What are the hours of the services?”

He gave them to her.

“I have a scattered parish and minister to several congregations, so I have to be everywhere.”

“I shall be at the early service,” she answered.

“It is quieter, sweeter, more peaceful, perhaps the more holy. I thank you that you have permitted me to see you and to speak to you and that you have not repulsed me as so many do.” He rose and again bowed over her extended hand.

“Good-bye!”

“Wait, perhaps you can serve me a little further.”

“In what way? I shall only be too glad.”

“Do you know what the letters A—E—I stand for?”

“A—E—I?”

“Yes.”

“Are they three separate letters indicating three words or——”

“I don’t know.”

“Let me think. A—E—I. Ah, I have it,” he said at last after a few moments of deep reflection.

“They form a Greek word which stands for eternity. They are sometimes used in what Shakespeare calls ‘the posy of a ring.’”

“Thank you, thank you,” she said, rising and clasping him by the hand. “You have helped me more than you can dream.”

“The answer is adequate then?”

"Perfectly."

"And I shall see you tomorrow."

"Yes."

He was gone. The sunshine filled the harbour which took on an added brilliance. The fragrance of the oleanders was sweeter than ever before. The whole riddle had been resolved. She had his message:—"I love you for eternity—R. N." And where was John Warburton then? She clasped her arm with the bracelet upon it near her heart and stood for a long time ecstatic, and then she slowly dropped her arm. She groped vaguely for a resentment which she should have entertained and found it not.

Yet somehow or other the presence of that holy man of God seemed to bring her to her senses in some measure. She was John Warburton's wife. The eternal love of Richard Neyland could not alter that fact. Yet she was in a tender mood and admitted to herself that she was glad for the message. She thought more kindly of the world and even of Warburton, with astonishing inconsistency, than ever before. Surely the consciousness of Neyland's devotion so delicately conveyed should lift her up to sublime heights. It was just a word. Nothing was asked of her. Such love should ennoble, not drag down.

She had promised to go to Communion the next morning. By as stern an effort of self-sacrifice as she ever made she took the bracelet from her arm. She went into the house and laid it away, locked it

up. She was minded for a moment to throw away the key of the casket but she did not. Instead she fastened it on a little chain she wore and dropped the piece of steel within her bodice. In her exalted mood she almost made up her mind when she went back to Warburton to be to him all that he would fain have her be.

She went to the Communion Service the next morning and joined the little handful of worshipping recipients in the simple old parish church. She was thankful for the light touch of the old Priest's hand on her head as he ministered to her at the rail.

She was a clear-sighted woman with a much more efficient head for business and administration than Father Smith had. He was only an old Saint. She heard him with avidity the next morning in his study. She entered into all his plans. Together they arranged great things and because of that she wrote a letter to her husband, formal and cold, but if he had known that she had not intended to write at all he might have appreciated her effort at its true worth instead of being so bitterly disappointed at the contents of the letter. It really told him nothing save that she had met this old Priest and was helping. His own reply briefly congratulated her on her good fortune and placed at her disposal all that she could ask, and that annoyed her for what she had done and planned to do further was out of her own very considerable fortune, not his.

She did not take the bracelet out again although

the pressure of the little bar of steel against her breast kept it fresh in her memory. She wore the key night and day. Friends and strangers finally ceased to call upon her. She was left alone with the work and with Father Smith for her only friend. A fictitious peace came over her soul, a simulacrum of happiness filled her heart. She would not allow herself to admit that she was simply putting aside decisions and in all probability when they had to be made she would find herself really unchanged. Removed from the necessity of determination and from temptation she lived in a fool's paradise, content, until one day she heard a step in the hall that she recognized.

She sat up in the chair in which she had been reclining, listening with terror in her heart. She did not turn her head, no, not even when a hand was laid lightly upon her shoulder although she knew the hand and recognized the touch.

CHAPTER XVI

OVERHEARD IN THE DUSK

RICHARD NEYLAND could not fight a uniformly successful battle. Ancestral tendencies cherished and exercised in descendants are not overcome without hard fighting. Certain of Neyland's environment could not understand what he was trying to achieve, and with laughter and jeers they encouraged him to fail. Of these Billy Alton was chief, with that cheerful little *divorcée*, his wife, a good second. Sometimes it seemed to those who really loved Neyland that these malign influences were more potent than those that worked for good about the young man. Old Colonel Tayloe found him one day at the club in a state of profound nervous depression. He had failed again and was just recovering. It was not the first time that Neyland had failed and this time he had gone down to the depths. To come to the surface again was terribly hard, the harder because in his saner moods he realized his degradation.

"I guess I'll give it up," he said desperately to Colonel Tayloe, "if she were my wife I might manage it."

He did not mention any names but the Colonel knew, of course, to whom he referred and he pitied him the more for the weakness of that confession, for the man who can not do it for his manhood rarely achieves it for a woman.

"Sometimes I believe the best thing will be to end it all. When I think of where I was last week and what I did and then think of her—my God! Colonel, I don't believe there is any God after all."

"My boy," said the Colonel. "Don't blame it on God. It's your fault, not His. Now you know I'm not one to utter flattering words, to cry peace when there is no peace, but I've watched you. I have no doubt that all that you say about last week is true, in fact I've heard something of it. These things can't be kept secret, but there is this to encourage you. In the first place you are heartily ashamed of it, so ashamed that you want to die, to take the coward's way to get out of it."

"Right," said the man bitterly.

"In the second place, these things before were a sort of a continuous performance, weren't they?"

"I suppose so."

"Now they are intermittent."

"What has that to do with it?"

"Much. I suppose you will come a cropper again," continued the practical old man, "but I'm hoping it will be a long time before you do, and the next time will be still longer, and by and by it will be so long that there won't be any next time."

"I'd give my heart's blood if it were true."

"Make it true. You can't break off short inherited and acquired habits like yours especially when you have weakened your will power as you have. It has got to be done by degrees and you must have help."

"Some don't help."

"I know," said the Colonel. "Damn those Altons and their kind. Yet they play a necessary part, perhaps. It is not by sequestering yourself that you conquer. You've got to face temptation as you face an enemy and beat it down before you are through with it."

"I suppose so but every time I fail I feel it worse."

"That's a sure sign that you are doing better. Don't give up. Keep everlastingly at it for the sake of your manhood."

"For her sake," cried the poor tortured man.

"Well, for her sake then," said the Colonel grimly. "She is another man's wife and can be nothing to you, but if you choose to regard her as an inspiration it won't do her any harm and it may help you. Meanwhile you're in no condition to be left alone, so I'm going to take you home with me."

"I'm not fit to go to your home."

"Perhaps not but you're going."

"But your daughter."

"It won't hurt her. She and the Duke are madly in love with each other and they are together all the time anyway, so you are coming with me

to have a good rest and get your balance again."

"People will talk if you take me. I can't go."

"Damn 'em, say I," burst out the Colonel, "let 'em talk. Do you suppose I care. Come along. I believe we aren't giving any functions. You can be quite alone."

"But the Duke and Miss Rose?"

"Rose always liked you and the Duke likes you too. You are the only man who ever got the better of him with a sword! He doesn't understand yet how you did it, and he has a certain respect for you on that account. You'll have no trouble with him."

And with many other arguments the old man overbore the other man's objections and carried him off home. With rare self-denial, for the bitterly repentent, intensely humiliated, and self-reproachful young man was no pleasant companion for Colonel Tayloe, the latter devoted himself to Neyland. He prescribed a strict regimen and regular hours and in the pleasant atmosphere of the Colonel's apartment Neyland gradually recovered his equipoise. Rose, who had all the good woman's ready compassion for the repentant rake, was gentleness itself. The Duke with the graceful courtesy and tact of his race was unexceptionable in his bearing toward him. Neyland was most grateful to them all.

The Duke offered to teach Neyland the use of the sword, laughingly exclaiming that he could not

understand how the latter had ever run him through in that encounter, and although the trembling, nervous American was far from his best the vigorous passages at arms with the little Italian helped him to become his normal self, to acquire again some self-respect, and to brace himself up for another try with the world, the flesh, and the devil for his manhood and his ideal. But these three powerful agencies were not done with him. They never would be.

One night he had gone into the library to seek diversion among the Colonel's books and tired out he had fallen asleep in a big chair which screened him from observation. Into the library came the Duke and Rose fresh from a canter in the park. They were utterly unsuspecting that any one was in the dimly lighted room. It was dusk and they paused a moment there before separating to dress for dinner.

"I sometimes doubt, *carissima mia*," said the Duke fondly, "whether you can love me as I love you. In Europe we sometimes arrange marriages where there is no love and generally they turn out well, but here in America you are different. If you don't love there is no happiness."

"You need not be afraid for me," said Rose.

She went up to him and bent her head. The little Duke stood very straight and kissed her and when his arm went around her waist hers went around his neck.

"I wouldn't care if you were only a private in your regiment," she whispered.

"I wish I were taller, my Rose," sighed the Duke.

"And that makes no difference either. You are the finest gentleman I know, you and my father. I wouldn't marry you if I didn't love you. I know what loveless marriages are. There's Chrissey de Selden——"

And that name restored the bewildered listener already half awakened by the voices, to full consciousness. He had been roused from his sleep by their words.

"What do you mean?" asked the Duke.

"She doesn't love her husband. She hates him. She is away from him now."

"May God pity her!"

"May He indeed!"

"It is as I say, a loveless marriage is—what you call it?—an inferno."

"Yes, and to make it worse she loves——"

"I beg your pardon," said Neyland thoroughly awake at last, rising to his feet and coming instantly forward. "I was asleep, I didn't hear you come in. I have just this moment awakened."

Rose Tayloe looked at him intently, meaningly. It was fortunate for him that the room was quite dark. He was ashamed that he had listened so long, yet he could not have spoken before and he was glad at what he heard.

"What have you heard?" she asked.

"Nothing." He could not bear to admit that he had heard everything. "Just voices and——"

"I am sorry we disturbed you," said the Duke.

"I'm glad you did. It must be late."

"We have barely time to dress for dinner," said Rose relieved at his assurance.

She would not have had any one else learn from her what she had just said to the Duke for anything.

"You will excuse me, I'm sure," said Neyland bowing and passing out.

"Oh, do you think he heard?" asked the girl as the lovers were left alone.

"He said not. You spoke softly. I love that soft low voice of yours. He is a man of honour. We may rest assured, I think."

"I wouldn't have him know for the world. I had almost pronounced his name."

"Does she love him?"

"Yes."

"In spite of that night at Sorrento?"

"In spite of everything."

"And Warburton is so fine a man."

"What does that matter when she loves Mr. Neyland?"

"I thank God," said the little Duke, "that it is not I she loves but that you and I——" After the necessary and inevitable sequence to these words he comforted her further. "I am sure he did not hear but if you like I will ask him."

"By no means," answered the girl, "for if he

did not it would make him think that we had spoken about him. He is extremely sensitive in his present condition and I wouldn't hurt him for the world."

"The least said the soonest mended is your proverb, is it not? And we have one like it in our land, which will be your land, *ma donna*. We will say nothing, he is a man of honour, I am sure."

Yes, Neyland was a man of honour but he had heard. He went to his room with the words ringing in his ears. She did not love her husband. She hated him. She loved someone else. Was he that someone?

He was a different man that night at dinner. His moodiness, his silence, his humiliation were gone. He sparkled with wit and humour and joyousness, so much so that they looked at him rather strangely and he caught the inquiry in their glances.

"You are all good friends," he said at last, "I assure you that I am quite myself"—for the first time in many days, he might have added—"and tomorrow, of your courtesy, with thanks to you, Colonel Tayloe, and to you, dear Miss Rose, and to you, Duke, I go back into the world again."

He lifted up his hands in a gesture of freedom as he spoke and they thought he had never looked so well. It was because of what he had heard that night and the resolution that he had taken that his

hand fell lightly upon Chrissey Warburton's shoulder as he came unannounced to the veranda at "Whileaway" and surprised her looking thoughtfully out over the sea.

CHAPTER XVII

AND THUS HE CAME

AND she was driven from that fool's paradise on the instant by the touch of a man's hand. That dream was broken. Her resolutions were shattered. An angel with the flaming sword of passion barred the way of return. Did Adam go first through the gate of Eden to be followed by Eve reluctant, clinging to her place, fain not to be dispossessed; or did she lead, or did they go out hand in hand?

How the little key burned against her heart as she confronted him! The message of the bracelet seemed to fall from lips that made no movement and gave forth no sound. It was she who spoke after the long pause.

"You!"

"Yes," he said and until then she could hardly believe that he was real.

"And why have you come?"

"To see you, just to see you."

She bit her lip and stared at him, her bosom rising and falling under the key. Her body shook as if the ground were trembling beneath her feet.

"But you should not have come. I put you

out of my life. I am married to John Warburton and——”

“But you don’t love him.”

“How do you know that?”

“Never mind how, and you don’t deny it. You hate him.”

“Did Rose Tayloe tell you?”

“Miss Tayloe is the soul of honour. She would not betray you for her life.”

“But how?”

“It is enough that it is true.”

“How dare you say that?” she cried, fighting desperately a losing battle.

“If it were not true I would not dare and you would not listen. I repeat, you don’t love him. Have you ever been his wife? In spite of all that I am, all that I have done—I was almost afraid to touch you a moment since——”

“You do well to remember.”

But he brushed her words away.

“You love me and I——”

“Don’t say it.”

“I am yours body and soul.”

“We are parted forever, absolutely.”

“No. I am here to claim you, to take you from him. It is my right. Love is king. I know my own unworthiness. I have tried since I saw you. Oh, God, how I have tried, and I have failed twice. I was trying because you asked me but with you I conquer. You are unhappy, miserable.”

"I am a wife."

"In name only."

"By the laws of God and man."

"We can break the tie."

"You mean?"

"Divorce. You should never have married him. You would be happier with me, wretched man that I am, not only because I love you,—I suppose Warburton loves you, too."

"Yes."

"In his cold, business-like way, but because you love me. If you loved him you would not be here. Did you read the message of the bracelet? I hoped you might be wearing it. I sent it to you that even in his arms I might speak to you."

"I read it."

"Where is it?"

"In my jewel case."

"And you could put it there?" he said, disappointment in his face and voice.

Her hand fumbled at her neck. She drew forth the little chain, the steel key warm from its contact.

"I carry the key next to my heart."

As he bent forward she drew back.

"Don't be afraid of me," he cried. "I wouldn't touch you until—unless——"

He seized the chain and placed his lips upon the key, which seemed to breathe of her.

"You understand, until I have the right I shall not lay my finger upon you. I should not have

touched you a moment since. I shall not again."

"You must go back."

"Of course, but not until you have told me the truth and until we have arranged what is to be done to give you your freedom and the chance of the happiness which is your right. That you should be chained to this man is monstrous, unthinkable; that you give yourself to him, hating him and loving me——"

"I do not contemplate that."

"Rather than that I would kill him with my own hands."

"Not that. I wouldn't have him hurt. He has been kindness itself to me."

"But you don't love him."

"No."

The confession was wrung from her at last. Neyland had scarcely eaten since the hour he had heard Rose Tayloe's inadvertent admission. And he had drunk nothing. His physical strength, undermined by his recent excesses, was unequal to the strain. He sank down in the nearest chair, buried his face in his hands, and leaned his head against the railing. Although he had been sure her admission was too much for him and a nervous trembling seized him.

"Don't give way like that," she said, laying her hand on his shoulder. "I'm not the first wife who doesn't love her husband."

"But you are the only one that I love and the only one that loves me." Then he lifted his head

and mastered his emotions. "I'll be strong, I can be strong for you, in no other way and for no other reason. Meanwhile I have arranged my affairs. No one knows of my absence. I shall be here for two weeks at least. We shall have time to talk over things, to settle things, to make our plans for the new life that is coming."

"Yes," said the woman, "but you must leave me free meanwhile. I depend upon you. If I followed my own heart," she yielded her hands to him, the colour flaming in her face. He understood. He took the hands that were proffered and kissed them. "I did not dream," she whispered, "as I watched the steamer thread its way through the islands yonder that it was bringing you to me. Is it happiness that has come? The pain is so exquisite here," she continued, withdrawing her hand and laying it upon her heart, "that I am fain to believe that it is——"

"And I shall see you?"

"Tomorrow at this hour."

"Why not tonight?"

"No. In the morning."

"As you wish. Everything with me shall be always as you wish," he replied, turning away with many a backward glance at the slender little figure standing by the balustrade looking out over the magic and the mystery of the mighty deep that lay before her.

CHAPTER XVIII

"LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION"

"FATHER SMITH," asked the woman in the quiet of the old priest's meagrely furnished, book-adorned study later in the afternoon, "do you hear confessions?"

"It is part of the duty of a Priest of the Church. I do not require it but when burdened souls come to me I am glad to be made the confidant of their troubles and to help them as God gives me the power. Every Saturday at suitable hours I pass a certain time in a confessional in the church yonder. Should you wish to come there——"

"No, I do not ask ecclesiastical absolution. I seek the advice of a friend."

"You have shown yourself the friend of my friends, the poor, dear lady, and all that I have is at your service."

He led her to a seat near the window and considerately placed her so that her face was in the shadow lest she should be embarrassed by the light. And lest he should be tempted to scrutinize her he turned his face away a little and looked up to the great ivory and ebony Crucifix hanging on the wall

above his *prie-dieu*. As was his custom in his study and about the church he wore his cassock. He was a High Churchman, albeit his services were of the simplest character. He took himself in his official position very seriously, humble before God and gentle with men, yet he did not fail to remember to emphasize the greatness of his embassy on occasion. Skilled as he was in reading character he realized that no ordinary trouble would cause a woman like Mrs. Warburton such intense agitation.

She had been gaining in strength during the two weeks that had passed but on that day she looked more haggard and distraught than when he had first seen her.

"My daughter," he began, breaking the long pause, "speak without hesitation and without reserve. No one hears you but He." He lifted his hand toward the Crucifix—"and I His humble minister."

"You know nothing of my history."

"Nothing, save that you are the wife of John Warburton."

"I belong to one of the oldest and proudest families in New York."

"I can well believe that."

"My father died and left me to the guardianship of Mr. Warburton, who is nearly twenty years older than I. Mr. Warburton proved himself a faithful and capable guardian. My mother supervised my education. When the time came I was

launched in society under the most favourable auspices. I am not poor. I had suitors without number and some of them cared for me rather than for my possessions.”

The old man smiled at her as if to say he could easily understand that, but he did not speak. It was better that she should tell her story without interruption. He wondered what was coming.

“I cared for but one of them. One night at Sorrento he told me that he loved me. I was ready to give myself to him but—he had a—a—failing.” She would fain not be disloyal to her lover and it was hard to go on. She had to force herself to speak. “He saw that I returned his affection when he spoke to me, but he was not master of himself and he—he—laid his hand upon—me. It was after a dinner. You understand?” she asked crimsoning.

The Priest nodded but made no answer.

“I thrust him from me. He fell, his head struck the stone of the terrace, he was unconscious. There was another suitor, an Italian. Without my authority he resented it and there was a duel. By some extraordinary mischance the Duke was wounded; Mr. Neyland,” she went on unconsciously—she had not used his name before—“went away. We knew there would be scandal. On the ship coming home Mr. Warburton asked me to marry him and I said yes. He had loved me ever since I had become a woman, but because he was so much older than I, he had stood aside and

waited, but when I thrust Mr. Neyland away and dismissed him he took heart and made his appeal. He doesn't know to this day what Mr. Neyland did or he would have killed him. And so I said yes. It seemed like a haven of refuge until we were married. On our wedding night I realized"—her voice sank to a low whisper—"the obligations of my position—and I begged him to leave me free"—she hesitated. The room was terribly still. "He did so."

There was a long pause but the Priest did not break it. His time was not yet. She was thinking about that night.

"The next day my mother died," she resumed at last. "I fell ill. The doctor said I must have a change, a rest, and so I came here. This morning there came to me the man I do love, Richard Neyland, the man who insulted me at Sorrento, but I have forgiven him. I could forgive him everything. He had discovered that I do not love my husband and that I do love him. He wants me to get a divorce and marry him, and so I come to you. What shall I do?"

"*For better, for worse,*" said the Priest softly, "*for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey——*"

"Don't say that."

"*Until death us do part.*"

"Those words mean nothing to me now."

"*According to God's holy ordinance,*" the old man went on with smooth, soft, quiet relentlessness.

“I do not think God had anything to do with it,” said the woman. “That is the point, He couldn’t want me to be so unhappy.”

“Do you remember the day I met you,” continued the old man, “and you asked me the meaning of certain letters, ‘A-E-I,’ and I told you they meant forever, eternity? Well, that is what your marriage was, at least until death breaks the bond, although in my thought perhaps not even then. ‘A-E-I,’ forever.”

It was unfortunate that those were Neyland’s words, not Warburton’s.

“I tell you I cannot. I will not be his wife.”

“Why not? What has he done?”

“He is perfect, flawless, generosity, kindness, restraint, everything, but I do not love him and when I think of being his wife I hate him.”

“And this other man——”

“Ah!”

“Is he worthy?”

“No, I suppose not. What has worthiness to do with it? I love him. I want him and he wants me. Happiness! I want that too. I am so young. Surely there is no law of God or man that would deny me my chance.”

“I do not know that we are put here to achieve happiness. I do not know that happiness is the end and aim of life,” returned the old man. “Ah, that is hard doctrine for the young. It is difficult for you to accept. Youth is always an hedonist. Modern society is epicurean. But you are not

asking me for the opinion of society. No one knows how thoroughly futile and worthless that judgment is better than yourself, who have been a part of it. You are asking me what Holy Church says. I speak with the voice of God. *'Whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder!'*"

He rose and extended his hand to her, a very different figure from the gentle, deferential friend of other days. And she shrank away from him, putting up a protesting hand herself.

"You have entered into the relationship of your own free will and according to your own showing your husband has given you no reason for repudiating that relationship," he continued, his voice rising. "You cannot even plead incompatibility of temper, merely a girl's passion for a man who by her own confession is unworthy of her. From a material point of view there is no promise of happiness in such a union even were it sanctioned by the Church as well as the State. You cannot do this thing. I have offered you the Body and Blood of Christ and you have taken it at His table. If you do this thing you can receive that no more. God may forgive but the Church which is His representative upon earth, shuts you out, or rather you shut yourself out. You must not do this thing."

"I suffer so."

"*'Is it nothing to you,'*" said the priest throwing his hand up to the Crucifix again, "*'all ye that*

pass by?' We are perfected through suffering. *'Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.'* If you should do this you would break your husband's heart. You might drive him to perdition."

"And if I do not I break the other man's heart."

"Not so. If you do this, if you carry out your purpose and enter into an alliance with this man you will be living in sin with a man who is weak already. You will both of you go down into the depths and as you are the stronger the fault will be more yours than his. Upon your soul will be laid the burden of three souls,—your husband's, this man's, and your own. Dear lady," said the old man, suddenly changing his tactics and coming over toward her where she sat with bowed head and clasped hands, and as he had done at that first communion he laid his thin hand upon her head. The rectory was but a little distance from her house and she had come down the road and across the fields without hat or wrap. "I feel for you. Confession for confession. I have never told a soul before, but there was a woman once. She belonged to someone else, yet her heart was mine and she would have gone with me. I was a young soldier. I thank God that I haven't the damnation of that woman's soul upon my shoulders with my other burdens. I thank God that He called me to be His minister, that I became a soldier of the cross, and you will thank God, too, if you resist this temptation."

"God help me!" said the woman brokenly.
"I cannot."

"Every hour I shall pray that you may grow in strength, that you may be purified even as by fire. I have hope, I have trust, I know that you will be victor in the strife."

She shook her head, her eyes streaming with tears.

"I cannot, I cannot."

"You will be loyal to your husband and to your duty—you must," he said inflexibly.

"So long as I bear his name, yes, but——"

"And you will bear no other while he lives. 'A-E-I,' forever," said the old man softly.

And then she turned and left him abruptly. She could endure no more. He stood a long time in the silent room. Pictures of his youth rose and passed before him. He saw as in a vision a woman's face. Around his neck he felt the touch of a woman's arms. Sweat bedewed his brow. He clenched his hands and stared at the crucifix. He stepped toward it and rested his bowed head upon the feet of Christ. He looked old and broken as he slowly lifted his trembling hands up and caught the arms of the cross and prayed.

"Lead us not into temptation, oh, Lord, lead us not into temptation."

CHAPTER XIX

THE MAN WINS

How runs the ancient rhyme?—

First she would and then she would not,
Next she could and then she could not.

That was exactly the situation which Chrissey Warburton entered into, deliberately enough but scarcely realizing the consequences. She had been overwhelmingly impressed by the old Priest's words. And that he spoke out of experience had made the impression the more profound. She had said that she could not continue to be John Warburton's wife. She had said that she would free herself from him and marry Richard Neyland, but as she went slowly across the field in the quiet of the evening and sat down on the terrace to think it over after a dinner that she scarcely tasted, it did not seem to her quite so easy.

Her desire to carry out the program, suggested to her by Neyland was just as keen as ever. She was as fully persuaded that she had a right to choose her happiness and that fortune had used her cruelly in preventing it as she had been before,

but the moral question bulked larger. She had always been a faithful and devoted churchwoman. Her religion had meant something more than respectable diversion, a graceful acknowledgment of the influence of the higher things in life. On the whole her beliefs were vital. So the love of God and the love of man wrestled within her soul, the one with the other as they have done since time and the world began. Which would win?

The old Priest in further counsel told her that she should flee temptation. He said that she must have nothing to do with Neyland. Without giving him up entirely, keeping the possibilities of her wished-for course alive though in the background, she had at first tried to follow that advice. Neyland himself interfered with that part of the program.

It is given to no man to trifle with himself, if the deadly usage to which he subjected himself could be called trifling, as Neyland had done without showing the marks of it. And sometimes when the marks do not show outwardly they exist inwardly. Wounds of the soul, though healed, will ache, even though there be no reddening scars to make confession. A weak mind usually breaks through its environment of flesh and makes a weak body. Neyland had sowed the seeds of the wind and although he had not yet reaped the whirlwind, the harvest was to be expected.

But his recognition of the fact, sudden and delicious, that Chrissey de Selden, for so she was

still to him, loved him in spite of what he had done to her and to himself, that she cared nothing for her husband, had so changed the spirit of his dream that he seemed almost a new man. The aching wounds of the soul, self-inflicted, were forgot in her presence. And she was blind.

He approached her the next morning with the colour, the light-heartedness, the buoyancy and enthusiasm of a boy. His laughter rang free. He had recovered the temper of youth and some mastery of himself. He had never appeared so entirely desirable. Save at Sorrento and in the interview before her marriage she had never seen him in his blacker moods, in his lower revelations. Now she idealized him and rejoiced in the idealization.

Chrissey Warburton was no weakling. She did not at once abandon her position. She did not immediately give up her determination. She did what was worse, she temporized. She would run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. She decided that she would not deny herself the pleasure of association with him, although she vowed that it should go no further. The woman proposed; who disposed in that instance?

Thence forward began idyllic days. The two played with fire, one thinking she could not be burned, the other caring not if he were consumed in the blaze. And the fact that the two wills had resolved upon two entirely different ends, one weakly, one strongly, counted for consequences

in the joyous pursuits of the enchanted island; and the further fact that one will at least was utterly oblivious to any consideration of right or wrong was the more decisive. The man thought only of happiness, to do him justice her happiness as much as his own. The moral question did not trouble him; for him, indeed, there was no moral question, just love and happiness. The woman was keenly alive to the error of her ways from a point of view which was strangely out of touch with modern society. This difference added zest to the situation.

Neyland was on his good behaviour. He devoted himself entirely to her with a rare delicacy, an exquisite self-denial, and a fascinating humour that she could scarcely resist. He had a mind richly stored, his experiences had been vast and varied. His birth and breeding had been of the finest. He shone before her, warm-hearted, impetuous, witty, humorous, or silently attentive if that were her mood. There was nothing to disclose weakness. He showed her everything but strength and power. She had had enough of strength in Warburton anyway. Even the consideration of her husband, his careful attention to her comfort, and his own self-sacrifice were remembered only to irritate. And there was a certain amount of strength in Neyland, too, at least the strength of a great passion.

Chrissey Warburton had frequent talks with Father Smith. The old man did not spare her.

He spoke as a Prince of the Church might have spoken to a subject. Like Richelieu he almost launched the curse of Christendom upon her. Sometimes she quaked under his stern reprimands while she resented them. Sometimes touches of tenderness and human sympathy, for he had grown to like this wayward, tempest-tossed little woman, would mollify her anger and resentment and she would resolve anew. She told him that there would be no end such as she had planned to this association, that eventually she would go back to Warburton, but when he urged her to break off the present intercourse she refused. That transient happiness at least she would cling to and enjoy.

Now Neyland was tact itself. He had considered the matter deeply and he had decided that it would be better for him not to refer to the future for the present. He had said his say that first day. He did not know that she had gone to the Priest with the proposition. He would let it work. Meanwhile he would devote his time to make his hold upon her firmer and more unbreakable. He would accustom her to his devotion, trusting that habit might make the heart grow fonder. He strove to make himself desirable, necessary, indispensable.

And so the man drove and the woman drifted on, the anchor chain that bound her to the Church chafing thinner and thinner, link after link breaking despite the watchful care of the captain to ease the strain. Out of his own heart the Priest prayed

for her as perhaps he had never prayed before, and he strove earnestly to retain the faith in her to which he had given utterance in that first interview, but it was a hard task and became harder.

It took a greater man than Neyland and a finer character to stand up long under such a strain. After two weeks of such delightful association as almost made her forget everything but that he was there and that he loved her and she loved him, he gave way to his feelings and the occasion of it was Father Smith. The ecclesiastic and the woman had just had an interview in which Chrissey Warburton had been even more stubborn and recalcitrant than usual.

To them on the porch at "Whileaway" entered Neyland. It was the first time he had met the Priest. Father Smith saw his opportunity, seized it, struck hard.

"Sir," said he, "pardon the liberty of an old man, but you do wrong to come here."

"And by what authority do you presume to speak?"

"By that of a Priest of the Church."

"I don't recognize your right."

"I appeal to you as a man of the world then, who was a man before he was a Priest, who has lived and loved and suffered, to break off this intimacy, to go away, to leave this woman to her better self, her higher nature."

"No," burst out the woman.

"Silence," said the Priest.

"I will not hear you further," cried Neyland.

"You shall, you must. Mrs. Warburton has no cause for reproach against her husband."

"She doesn't love him."

"Love! How can it be weighed for a single moment beside duty?"

"She owes him no duty."

"True enough. We don't owe duties to men."

"To whom then?"

"To God."

"She is so unhappy," answered Neyland, evading the direct issue while Chrissey Warburton listened breathlessly.

"And you will make her more unhappy."

"No," cried the woman again.

But Father Smith paid her no attention whatever as he answered.

"Oh, I grant you that a certain satisfaction, what the world calls happiness, may be yours for a little. She doesn't see things clearly now nor do you. If you sin against the law——"

"Man's law?"

"God's law. You will eventually so deeply regret it, your unhappiness then will be so lasting, that the brief pleasure you may have had will be forgot and for eternity!"

"And does God demand that of this poor girl?" —Neyland stepped over to her and put his arm about her and as in a dream she suffered him. He stood very straight and held her close—"Does God's law or justice, if you believe in them, require

that this woman should be unhappy, that she should suffer a lifetime, because of an insult of which I have repented in ways that no priest could dream of? Should her life be ruined for her impulsive action or mine?"

"It is not those actions which will ruin it, but you."

"I cannot speak for her," said Neyland, "but I am content to accept whatever fate the future may hold so that I may have her. Would you force her into the arms of a man she hates?" he went on passionately. "Is not that profanation? Would you keep her from the man she loves?"

"No," answered the priest. "I would force her nowhere, but she assumed a duty which carries with it an obligation. I have such confidence in her that if you will leave her I am sure she will come to see that duty."

"In what way?"

"In the path of honour lies the way of duty and I know she will find the course of affection runs there as well."

"And if not?"

"She is still bound. Oh, not to live with her husband but to live with his name, at least without yours, and devote herself to good works, to find in them her highest happiness."

"I know a nearer way, and a surer, in my arms, here next to my heart."

"And you, my daughter," said the old man, "whom I have learned to love, I appeal to you

once again. Don't shatter my faith and break my trust. Don't commit this deadly sin. The Church of your youth, the Church of Christ, holds out its arms to you." He suited action to words by extending his own arms. "Come away from temptation. Be strong. Send for your husband. Dismiss this man."

The hour of choice was upon her. She had weakened her resistance by association with the idea. She stared at the Priest a long time. Neyland had the wit to say nothing. The ecclesiastic could only wait. By and by she turned slowly as if drawn by some irresistible force away from the outstretched hand of the Church until she hid her face on Neyland's breast.

"I love him," she whispered.

"You see, sir," said Neyland quickly.

Father Smith threw up his hands.

"May God have mercy upon her and upon you!" he said with head bowed as if in prayer. Then turning away he added, "I shall never cease to pray that you may awake, both of you, before it is too late."

"And will you leave us now, sir?"

"I have another word to say," said the Priest pausing. "I have heard not a little of you, sir. Are you the kind of a man to whom any woman's happiness should be entrusted?"

"How dare you?" cried Neyland, his face convulsed with angry passion, partly at least because the keen question hurt.

"I dare all that becomes a man and a Priest, sir. Think that over as best you can."

He turned and went out without a further word.

"I don't care what you are," said the girl, lifting her face toward him. "I love you."

"I shall be anything," answered the man, "anything that you make me."

Then he released her and thrust her gently away and stood looking down upon her.

"Why did you do that?"

"I was afraid."

He saw that in her face which gave him courage. First he bent his head and closed his eyes lest she should see anything that should affright her. Then he kissed her and swept her to his heart. It was over. The battle had been fought and she had lost. He had won.

"Go now," she said at last. "I cannot bear any more happiness even. You will be good to me, won't you?"

What he answered was not true.

"I will. We shall be so happy."

"But you mustn't kiss me again until you can do so honourably. I am still his wife, I——"

"I understand. Good-bye."

He turned away. She put her hand on his arm as if to detain him. He stopped.

"No," she said. "Go, but come tomorrow early. The horses will be ready. We will ride out into the woods somewhere to be alone—together."

CHAPTER XX

CAVE MEN

NEYLAND was an accomplished horseman and Chrissey was equally at home in the saddle. She never looked more attractive than the next morning, when he came down the oleander walk and bounded up the steps to greet her, standing in her habit with the groom holding the horses hard by. She had said that there must be no lover's familiarities between them, and she was sorry as soon as she had done so, although she knew her decision was right. After all, having taken the greater plunge, what were these smaller matters? The groom and the house servants would have prevented any demonstrations, yet what did that matter either? They had already drawn their own inferences from the intimacy. She felt a certain royal indifference to public opinion.

She extended her hand to him and he noticed on her arm for the first time and pushed up so that he could see it beneath her riding gauntlet, his bracelet. His hand trembled as he mounted her upon her horse. And they rode over the hills and far away together for such a day as neither had

spent before. They found a charming little way-side inn on one of the more secluded roads of the enchanted island near the wilder south shore and there under the trees they broke bread together in the most delightful of intimacies.

It was late in the evening when they came back to the villa. As she dismounted with his assistance she naturally fell into his arms and although it had been prohibited he boldly kissed her before he released her. She made no remonstrance. She even kissed him in return. They turned leaving the horses to the groom, who came around the house just too late to see this exchange of kisses. Slowly they ascended the steps to the hall to meet John Warburton in the doorway.

She remembered that the *Bermudian* was due that day. He had come without a word of warning. He had hurried to the villa. The servants told him that she had gone out for the day and when he had asked with whom they had been forced to tell him with Neyland. Savagely pacing up and down the veranda in silence during the long afternoon he had enjoyed ample time thoroughly to digest that fact, although in his most anxious moment he did not suspect the truth.

It happened that he had not heard the horses coming slowly down the long avenue under the oleanders until they had halted before the door. John Warburton was the soul of honour and dignity. He would not have been guilty of espionage. He came through the hall from the front porch

overlooking the sea to the rear porch overlooking the garden without the least attempt at concealment. Had the lovers not been so absorbed in each other they would have heard him. As it was he saw his wife in the arms of another man, that man's kiss upon her lips unrebuked, welcomed, returned!

Never had the ability to control himself, his iron capacity for self-repression, been more thoroughly in evidence. He stood in the doorway as if rooted to the spot while the two upon whom he bent the fierceness of his gaze slowly mounted the rather long flight of stone steps. It was not until they had nearly reached the top that they saw him. They were at his mercy. The advantage of position was entirely with him. He could have sprung upon them and thrown them both down the steps and they could have offered no effective resistance. The impulse to do that very thing was strong. Although his wife's avoidance of him and refusal to allow him to have anything to do with her had cut him to the quick, he had never suspected that it arose from anything but the natural repugnance of an unloving woman.

He had never found out what Neyland had done that night at Sorrento. Foolishly he had refused to let her tell him. He had rested content in the conviction that Neyland had been put out of the running for good. What had caused the association to be renewed? There could be but one answer to that question.

He was not of jealous temperament but that very fact now caused him to give way to the most furious jealousy. He had never experienced such a sensation in his life. He was firmly resolved to kill Neyland then and there. The surge of his passion was the greater because of his habitual repression. Yet he would take no unfair advantage of the man. He could scarcely have attacked him without attacking his wife anyway.

The groom had taken the horses, the butler had followed him to the doorway. He must make no scene before them. His purpose would lose nothing of its intensity for a momentary delay, so he stood quite still until they caught sight of him. The woman uttered a low, shuddering cry. Neyland whose arm had been about her waist released her for a second and then he seized her again as if to reassert his claim. He was no coward physically. He was as brave as a man could be, or had been, before he had weakened his nerve by his mode of life.

Warburton bowed to the two. In his usual impassive way and with a voice that did not break he welcomed them while he waved them forward, stepping back from the hall door to give them passage.

"Won't you come in?" he said as they entered the door and Neyland shifted his hold from the waist to the arm of the woman, who was between the two.

He followed them through the hall from one side

of the house to the other and confronted the pair on the veranda having dismissed the butler and carefully closed the door behind him. The porch was perhaps twenty feet broad and in part uncovered. The house was built on a cliff overlooking the water, which beat at the foot of the coral rocks something like a hundred feet away, and it was perhaps thirty feet sheer down to the high tide level. There was a stone balustrade on the seaward edge of the open terrace, something like that at the Victoria in Sorrento.

Warburton never carried a weapon. It was his swift purpose to seize Neyland and throw him over the balustrade and let him be killed by the fall to the rocks below. The two men were evenly matched in size. Neyland had the advantage of youth. He was at least fifteen years younger than Warburton and much more accustomed to athletic exercise but Warburton had the benefit of a clean and regular life. Normally the handicap of years would have put him hopelessly at a disadvantage but now, if anything, the superiority was with him.

Neither man stopped to weigh these facts. Each man was possessed of a violent hatred for the other and in these hates once again Warburton had an advantage, for in Neyland's mind was some consciousness of guilt, a certain feeling of shame.

Chrissey Warburton's feelings baffled analysis. A wild, overpowering, overmastering terror

filled her. What had led her to imagine that Warburton would condone such an offence or receive it with indifference she could not imagine. In spite of the fact that he stood there so quietly, only his blazing eyes indicating his passion, she felt it. His first words confirmed her every fear.

"Take your hand off my wife's arm and stand aside if you have the manhood to back up your actions, you—" He did not need to express in words what naturally would have followed that final pronoun. No one could mistake the content of his contempt. "I might have killed you on the steps yonder but it is not my way. I fight fairly and in the open."

Neyland did not need a second bidding. He dropped the girl's arm instantly and even took a step toward Warburton. Disdaining to strike him and brushing aside Neyland's uplifted arm the older man leaped at him. In an instant the two men were locked in a silent, wordless, terrific struggle.

The woman shrank back against the wall, aware only of a reeling black figure and a brown one intertwined, for Warburton, who was unusually punctilious about such matters, had changed into evening clothes while Neyland still wore his riding suit. She was only conscious of whirling, straining, writhing giants reeling to and fro, scattering chairs and tables, breathing hard. The very silence with which they fought save for their deep respirations yet seemed to fill the still air of the pleasant night

with all the noises of battle. Their passions were not clamant to the ear but to senses.

As each strained and struggled mightily, presently cleaner life and moral justice began to tell. Foot by foot, and the slight degree of progress indicated the desperate nature of the resistance, Warburton forced Neyland toward the balustrade. Even to the dazed, bewildered girl, watching as a cave woman might have done two wild prehistoric lovers fighting for her favours, came the perception that the man of her choice was being beaten. Although she was scarcely conscious of it, mingled with her determination to go to his assistance was a little thrill of admiration for the prowess of her husband. At last he was showing himself a man with a man's passions. If he had only mastered her that way, but——

As it often happens a struggle may be maintained on practically equal terms for a certain period but there comes an instant when resistance fails and the master has his way. In this crisis Neyland was paying for the past. With a mighty rush, for all the strength of Neyland seemed suddenly to have passed into the arms of Warburton, the latter forced him to the balustrade and with a great effort heaved him high in the air.

What was he about to do? The woman realized it instantly. Like a bolt from a catapult she flew across the porch and grasped Warburton's arm. She dragged at it with a force and power no one

could have imagined so slight a body could have exerted.

"For God's sake," she cried, panting out the words as she struggled.

But Warburton was in no mood to heed such an appeal. God had been forgotten in the tempest of passion.

"For my sake," cried the woman, using the only effective words. "I love him," she screamed in desperate abandon.

The words seemed to give Neyland an access of strength. White faced, breathless, spent, he yet managed to get his feet against the balustrade. It would not have served, nor would the frantic help of the woman have prevented it were it not that the consciousness of these direful words suddenly penetrated Warburton's brain. He gave over the effort. Some of the strength went out of him, too. He still held Neyland immovable but he made no attempt to thrust him over. Suddenly he released him and not gently threw him from him. Neyland went reeling but caught the balustrade as he staggered and broke his fall. So he went down and once again she saw the man she loved at her feet, this time not put there by her own hand. Warburton towered over the prostrate man and the shrinking, awestruck figure of his wife. The woman put her hands to her head.

"You love that?" cried Warburton.

"Yes," said the woman, dropping to her knees and clasping her half-dazed lover in her arms.

"Let me up," gasped Neyland. "Do you think I'd allow myself to be beaten by him?"

His courage was indeed worthy of a better cause. He struggled to a sitting position and finally got to his feet dragging her up also. Warburton made no effort to prevent. The woman again stood between them.

"You love him?" asked the older man again, with indescribable emphasis on the pronoun.

"Yes," repeated the woman defiantly.

Perhaps, if Warburton had not pressed her so hard, if she had not followed the impulse to make good and to stand by the other she might not have been so ready. He was unfortunate in his questioning, for really she had more regard for Warburton in her heart at that moment than ever before. But having burned her bridges behind, there was no way of retreat. She had to stand to her guns. Besides, although Neyland had been beaten he was by no means a despicable figure.

"You got the better of me once," he gritted out, white with passion and shaking with nervousness but quite unafraid, "but I will try it again and again and again until I can try no more."

He moved toward the other man but Chrissey Warburton kept them apart.

"And I," said Warburton to her, quite oblivious of Neyland, "your husband, what about me?"

And again the question was not wise. The woman could make no other answer.

"You, I hate," she cried.

"Why, what have I done?"

"You married me when I loved someone else."

"But that was of your own free will."

"I didn't know."

"You should have known."

"I never said once that I loved you. I didn't realize what it meant until——"

"Great God!" cried the man, "and now you bring this dishonour upon my name."

"Your name," laughed the woman. "You have no name. You're a——"

She stopped, leaving the sentence incomplete before the awful look of her husband. She would have given worlds to have recalled the mordant taunt as soon as it had escaped her lips, for this time she had pierced the joint in his armour. He reeled back against the balustrade as if he had been struck by a trip-hammer. It was his turn to catch the railing for support. In the half-light she could see the colour leave his face, the colour that had been brought there by passion and jealousy and the fierce pulsation of his struggle.

"And you can say that to me, Christianna?"

"Stand aside, Chris," said Neyland imperiously, fortunately not understanding. "We've got to finish this thing."

"No," said the woman. "Physically he is stronger."

"Physically," laughed Warburton, wildly putting his hand to his heart.

"I have just given up the man I hate," said the

woman desperately. "I don't propose to have the man I love killed before my very eyes. You are my one chance of happiness, Richard," she pleaded. "Won't you please go?"

"And leave you alone with him?"

"He won't harm me, I'm sure of that."

"Will you give me your word of honour, Warburton?"

"I'll have no dealings whatsoever with you, Neyland. You don't know the meaning of honour." Warburton straightened up as he spoke. His colour came back. "Surely I may have the privilege of a few words with my wife, she still bears that title, in my own house without your presence," he added.

"I'll see you in the morning," said Neyland. "I'm staying at the Belmont."

"You need not be afraid but that I will look you up. The score between us has got to be settled."

"Won't you please go? For God's sake! I can't stand it any longer. Don't you see? If you ever expect me to— Go," pleaded the woman.

"If you lay the weight of your finger on this woman," said Neyland, "you'll settle with me. If I can't do it with my naked hands I'll shoot you on sight."

"Oh," interposed Chrissey Warburton, "this is too much! If you don't go at once Richard, I swear that neither of you— I'll kill myself."

"Your wish is still my law," said Neyland, swinging past the other two to the door.

Warburton threw it open.

"Your way," he thundered.

Neyland drew himself up. He was trembling in every nerve, trembling from the violence of the struggle, trembling from the sense of defeat, trembling from the weakness of a shattered vitality too heavily drawn upon, but if it were to be his last effort he would not show it. He took the woman's hand and kissed it reverently.

"I am sorry for your sake," he said. "I will see you in the morning."

He walked by Warburton with the steady step of strength and pride, his head up, and Warburton might have struck him as he passed and killed him but he recognized that Neyland paid that tribute to his spirit of fair play. Neyland had attempted to steal his wife behind his back but Warburton could not strike a man in the same way. Neyland would not have done it either, although he had no compunctions with regard to the wife! Such is the strange ethical code of men.

CHAPTER XXI

SHE MUST GO ON

WARBURTON closed the door behind him and turned to confront his wife. For a moment she faced him and then oppressed by the weight of the near tragedy of love and life she sank down in a chair, her hands on the arms, her head thrown back, her face upturned toward him, a little conscious of his mastery, a little afraid, a little relieved and greatly miserable. His first action was somehow characteristic. He adjusted his disordered garments as if in the straightening of his clothes he was pulling himself together again. And then he came toward her. She shrank away a little, whereat he laughed again.

"You need have no fear. I will do you no harm."

"I know that."

"And nothing, no physical torture that I could inflict upon you would in any way compensate for the agony of these moments. Oh, believe me, not so much because you do not love me. I was a fool to expect that, but from the humiliation that comes to me, when I think that once I loved you."

His voice was low and quiet, steady, even, almost monotonous but not quite. There was more in the slight emphasis upon the final pronoun than a stranger would have heard but she recognized its contempt.

"What do you mean?" she asked, writhing a little under that merciless scorn.

"It's a deeper insult, since you cannot love me, that your affections should decline to that drunken dissolute blackguard, Neyland, of whose quality you had a taste in Sorrento. What did he do there?"

His bad angel stood at Warburton's elbow. If he had pleaded or if he had seized her and lifted her up as he had grasped Neyland, even but to throw her over the cliffs she might have— As it was his contempt of the man she loved and of herself also filled her with fury. She sprang to her feet and confronted him. With bold and somehow splendid defiance she told him in words swift and white-hot with passion and resentment just what had happened on the terrace at Sorrento. Warburton laughed again. Mrs. de Selden had said that he was an unsmiling man, not given to merriment. What would she have thought, nay from what blue heaven above them bent looking on, perhaps, what did she think of him now?

"He outraged your modesty and through his vile touch he seems to have polluted your soul."

"How dare you say that?" cried the woman, seizing him by the arm and in her furious anger

striving to shake the man. She might as well have tried to move a pyramid. He thrust her away roughly.

"Off," he said bitterly. "I'd rather be the child of the streets that I am, the son of a shame that is not my own, the nameless outcast that you called me, than such as you. I may bear the burden of some other's evil. You have on your shoulders a weight that is all your own."

For one swift moment came the impulse to apologize, to withdraw those bitter words she had flung at him in the heat of passion. Warburton did not give her time.

"Of course," he said, resuming his ordinary tone as if ashamed of his recent outbreak. "I have no right to talk that way to you. Your opinions are your own. The privilege of your sex enables you to express them with impunity. You will see the impossibility from my point of view, as well as the undesirability from yours, of your bearing that name of the street any longer."

"You mean?"

"You may take the freedom that you crave, which will enable you to go to the lover who perhaps may not have waited for a legal sanction to possess himself of what was mine."

The woman could grow no whiter. The unavoidable inference of his cruel words had given her the deadliest insult that his scorn and contempt could have heaped upon her. She forgot her own provocation of him.

"You may think what you please," she burst out, "it is a matter of indifference to me, but you shall not say that. Not for your soul's comfort but for my own self-respect I deny that charge. I am as I was save in my heart. As for freedom, you voice my own wish. I shall seek it the quickest way."

"I do not think there is anything more to be said," returned Warburton.

"Yes, there is."

"And what is that?"

"I want you to let Richard Neyland alone."

There was a long pause.

"I love him, I tell you," cried the woman desperately. Was she convincing herself of that fact. "I am young, life is before me. Free from you I shall have a chance at happiness with him. I want it. Do not take it from me. You are stronger. Leave him to me."

"To do him justice, although he is a thief and blackguard, I do not believe he would enjoy a woman pleading for his safety."

"He will not know."

"Yes, sooner or later."

"He will never know from me."

"You will tell him."

"That is my lookout."

The man thought deeply.

"My dream is over," he said more quietly. "Christianna, when your father left you to me, I swore over his dead body that I would be true to

the trust. I told your mother the same thing as she lay dying before us a month ago. It seems that their approbation is all I have to hope for in life, failing your affection. I won't touch him, but for God's sake keep him out of my way. You have looked upon me as something other than a man, but you may have seen from this night how I feel! Go and get your divorce and marry him. I can scarcely wish you a more unhappy fortune. For the rest I am sorry I said what I did about you a moment since. I do not believe you are a bad woman physically, perhaps not bad at heart. Your fortune I shall be glad to transfer to your own care, or to that of any trustee you may appoint and you know, of course that any demand you may make upon me——"

"I will make none," said the woman, "I only want to be free."

"Very well, I suppose you will be going back home, I mean to New York——"

"At the first opportunity."

"Your address will be?"

"I shall go to Colonel Tayloe's."

"That is well. I came down on the *Bermudian*, but the yacht will be here tomorrow. I couldn't wait for her, I was so anxious to see you. Will you go back on her?"

"No, on the *Bermudian*."

"I'll take the yacht then. Shall I arrange for your return passage?"

"You need not trouble."

"Good night," he said, turning away with a slight bow.

The interview ended as most domestic tragedies do eventually, in this utterly commonplace way. She had a wild impulse to cry out, to call him back, if only to unsay some of the things that she had said, but she checked it. She had never come so near loving him as at that moment and she had never hated him so deeply as at the next and she had never loved Richard Neyland so much as she did one instant and she had never seen so clearly the difference between the two men as she did at the other.

If her conscience was not clear her soul was relieved in a measure. Her husband himself had suggested that she get a divorce, and a divorce she would get and Neyland she would marry. That happiness she craved she would take. She buried her face in her hands and sobbed and sobbed. It did not seem a very promising foundation on which to build happiness. Well, having chosen the course she walked in it and she did it the more deliberately because conscience strove to turn her from the path, and even out of the heart from which proceed all manner of things came strange thoughts. She was not entirely clear and satisfied. How splendidly Neyland had borne himself in that defeat. How splendidly Warburton had shown himself in that victory! Why could she not have loved Warburton instead of the other? How simple and easy it would have been then!

She lay back in the chair and stared out into the deeps of the still night at the silent stars, at the softly moving sea, caressing the rugged, rocky shore, her breath coming long and shudderingly. She was driven again by the wind of her own passions and by the tempest of her own desires. She thought she must go on now. She had burned her boats upon the shore. She might not cross the other side. She must go on. Whatever betide, whatever awaited, she must go on. Neyland, Warburton, Neyland——

BOOK IV
THE VALLEY OF DECISION

CHAPTER XXII

ON DIFFERENT SHIPS

ONCE again Chrissey Warburton stood on the bridge of an incoming steamer and surveyed the sky line of New York as the *Bermudian* slowly made its way up the channel. Scarcely three months had intervened since she had looked at the same stupendous picture from the bridge of the *Acquitania*. And how much water had rolled down the Hudson or flowed under the great bridges spanning the East River since that time! Then she had sailed under a cloudless sky, through the warm airs of a bright September day. Now it was winter. The sky was grey and sombre. Little flakes of snow were driven against her pale cheek by the cold north wind. Most of the passengers had sought shelter in the cabins but she liked to face the storm which somehow matched the turmoil in her soul. Outwardly she was well protected from the buffets of the brewing tempest. Inwardly the enemy raged at will.

She had left Bermuda the second day after the terrible scene on the porch, and in the day that intervened between that furious, passionate

grapple of elemental forces she had seen no one. She had refused Father Smith. She had denied herself to Neyland. Warburton had made no effort to see her. Father Smith sat alone in the study on the day the *Bermudian* sailed, looking at a little note which she had sent him, and thus it ran:

DEAR FATHER SMITH:

After a terrible encounter between the man I love and the man I married it has at last been decided, at Mr. Warburton's suggestion, although I do not blame him for making it, that I am to get a divorce in order to marry Mr. Neyland. I know, of course, what you think of this plan, what you think of me, but I cannot help it. I am so wretched and miserable. Surely there is some happiness for me somewhere. I am going to seek it. My way is not your way. I cannot ask your blessing upon what your conscience does not approve. I am sorry to disappoint you but I must think of myself.

Gratefully and sorrowfully yours,

C.

It had been a difficult letter for the woman to write and the hardest part was the subscription. She could not bring herself to sign her legal name Christianna Warburton, to Chrissey de Selden she had no right, her Christian name seemed unsuited. The initial had to suffice. The old priest would understand. Yes, he understood many things. He understood that though the woman had suffered much she had not suffered sufficiently. He real-

ized that the element of self still transcended that of self-sacrifice. He prayed that the latter in the end might be supreme. Getting a divorce even in the facile United States was a matter of some time. Something might intervene.

Accustomed as he was to estimate accurately men and women it seemed monstrous that Chrissey Warburton should give way to a mere desire to be happy for the sake of Neyland, who could not be compared with Warburton. Nor did he know Warburton from hearsay only. Chance, although it took the shape of Providence to the Priest, had brought him in touch with the other actor in the tragic drama into which he had been thrust.

Late on the night of the day of the meeting his vigil in his study was disturbed by a rap on the door. The church was embowered among trees at some distance from the road. The rectory was closer to the highway and his study abutted upon it. He was glad for that, although sometimes the passing traffic annoyed him, because it made him so easy to reach. He always kept a light in the window.

One of the sudden tropic storms which so frequently visit the island had swept over it that night, and when he opened the door he was confronted by a drenched figure seeking shelter. After he had flung himself out of the house John Warburton decided to go to Hamilton to one of the larger hotels for the night. Neyland was at the Belmont, which was close at hand and convenient, but

Warburton did not desire to run the risk of meeting him. Perhaps the hardest part of his promise to his wife had been to let Neyland alone.

He had refrained from calling a carriage and had welcomed the physical fatigue involved in the long walk. He had welcomed the buffeting of the storm, too. But when it seemed as if the fountains of the great deep had been broken open again and the torrential rain had soaked through the light overcoat he wore and had drenched him to the skin, he sought the shelter promised by the light in the rectory window.

"Come in, sir, come in," said the Priest heartily.

"If you will give me a few moments' shelter," said Warburton stepping within, "until the violence of the storm has abated I shall be grateful."

"You can stay the night, if you will, sir," was the hospitable reply. "But these storms stop as suddenly as they begin. If you are desirous of continuing on your way you can do so with impunity in a short time, I am sure. Allow me." He took Warburton's wet overcoat and threw it over a chair near the fire. "If you will come closer this will help you to dry out. I am sorry that my own clothes are inadequate for a man of your build."

"I shall do very well with what I have," returned the other acknowledging these courtesies with a grave bow, "but I appreciate your kindness none the less."

He drew near the fire and spread out his hands toward the blaze as if to draw in some of the heat. The Priest noticed how haggard and strained was the face of his strange guest. He had no suspicion of his identity but it seemed proper to introduce himself.

"I am Father Smith," he said, "the Rector of this Parish."

"My name is Warburton," reluctantly returned his visitor.

"Is it possible?"

"Yes. What does the name mean to you?"

"Everything," said Father Smith. "I have formed the acquaintance of your wife."

"Ah!"

"She is a woman for whom I have come to entertain not only profound respect but I might almost say as a father, sir, and not merely of the Church, a deep affection. Pardon me, Mr. Warburton," continued the old man, lifting up a hand as he saw his guest's features stiffen. "I am going to take the liberty of age and my position to speak frankly. I know by their own confession and by my observation the whole story of that unhappy young woman and of Mr. Neyland. Your wife——"

"Since you know so much," said Warburton coldly, "although I do not care to discuss my affairs with strangers as a rule, let me say to you that tonight Mrs. Warburton decided to obtain a divorce from me."

"I cannot bear to hear that. I have pleaded with her——"

"To do her justice," said Warburton, "it was my own suggestion. I found them—together and——"

"Sir, you wrong yourself; and that suggestion, if it proceeds from any suspicion of that lady——"

"It needs no stranger to persuade me of Mrs. Warburton's entire innocence of any such wrongdoing," was the answer prompt and proud.

If only Chrissey Warburton could have seen and heard him then, thought the Priest.

"Why then should you—forgive me if I speak the language of the world of which I once was—play into your enemy's hand?"

"There are words, sir—have you not known it?"—replied the other, "which sometimes are worse than deeds. For reasons which I cannot understand she loves this man and she hates me. She could not have spoken as she did tonight otherwise."

There was a long pause. Warburton shivered as he stood before the fire under the other man's watchful eye. The Priest noticed it. From a little cupboard he brought forth a bottle and a glass.

"There are some to whom I would not dare to offer this."

"Neyland?"

"Exactly, but in your case, sir, I fear you will be ill."

Warburton had no scruples to prevent but that night he waved it away.

"I will not resort to Neyland's course," he said.

"Mr. Warburton," said Father Smith, "how far you may be amenable to the appeal of religion, of the Church, I know not."

"I respect it, sir, if nothing else."

"So I appeal to you as a man. You are, pardon the liberty, much older than your wife. She is scarcely more than a girl. She has been very unhappy through this man. If she marries him she will be more unhappy. He is entirely unworthy of her. Strange how physical beauty and mental attractiveness are sometimes associated with such moral weakness as I suspect in him."

"You are right, sir, and that makes it harder to stand by and let it go on."

"Don't stand by. Exercise every legal means you can employ to delay this course into which she has plunged herself. Withdraw your consent, fight them both at every turn. Gain time. It gives God a chance to work. Given opportunity she may learn what life would be with this man before it is too late, and *per contra* those qualities which I am sure you possess may at last impress her."

"It is a powerful plea and ably urged, sir," said Warburton, "but in my case unavailing. That has passed between us which can never be forgot."

"Forgot, no!" said the priest quickly. "We never forget unless we are of so soft a consistency

that we retain no impression even though made by the sharpest tool; to forget is not easy but to remember and forgive is divine, sir."

"I am not capable of it. She has chosen her path, she must walk in it. I cannot even enlighten her as to the character of the man. My motives would be misconstrued should I attempt it. I can hear you no further, sir," continued Warburton, checking the eager Priest. "Why I have permitted my private affairs to be discussed I scarcely understand. It is not my habit."

"I can well believe that."

"Yet you seem to invite confidences."

"I have not been receiving them for well nigh fifty years for nought, sir."

"So it would seem. You will respect mine, I am sure. The rain has stopped. I must be on my way. For your interest I thank you. Good-night."

He seized his coat, somewhat dried by the fire, bowed to the Priest, and turned to the door. Father Smith anticipated him. He was too wise in dealing with men to argue further with Warburton.

"Good-night, sir," he said. "I shall not cease to pray for you and your wife."

"Pray for Neyland," said Warburton looking back. "He needs it most of all."

"I'm not so sure of that," said the old man to himself as he watched Warburton's figure disappear in the darkness.

Warburton was to have another meeting with Neyland the next day. He came back the next morning to give the servants directions as to the closing of the house and their departure after his wife had gone. The *Bermudian* was not to sail until the following day, so he knew that she was still there. But he made no effort to see her. She had told him the night before that she would arrange her own departure and henceforth administer her own affairs. He took her at her word.

Coming down the long avenue bordered with oleanders—how he loathed those flowers and their odour!—he met Neyland. Warburton gave no sign that he even saw him.

"Stop," cried Neyland confronting him.

Warburton moved to one side and sought to pass on but Neyland would have none of it. He thrust out his hand threateningly and then Warburton found voice.

"If you lay a hand on me I'll kill you, promise or no promise."

"Promise! What do you mean?"

"At my wife's plea I agreed to let you alone."

"I don't need protection from you, Warburton," cried Neyland passionately. "I'll shelter myself behind no woman. Forget her plea."

"If I did," said the other man grimly, "it would be the worse for you."

"You are stronger than I," said Neyland. "I'm not altogether myself these days and so I made ready for you."

He whipped out a short heavy automatic and presented it. Warburton looked at him.

"The coward's refuge."

"No, an equalization."

"Well, why don't you shoot? That would be an ideal ending. The blood of the husband to accompany the honour of the wife. You hesitate." Warburton thrust his hands in his pockets. "I'll wait," he continued quite quietly. "When you have decided you need not trouble to let me know, just pull the trigger."

There was a long pause. Neyland's fingers itched to press the trigger but he could not do it though the rage in his heart grew and grew.

"I have business of importance to attend to," said Warburton at last. "Perhaps I am sheltered by some promise you made to Mrs. Warburton just now. If that be so, as her husband I will absolve you."

"I have not seen her. She refused herself to me."

"It is a little late, perhaps, for that," said Warburton, "but you two will see enough of each other later on."

"What do you mean?"

"I see no reason why I shouldn't tell you that Mrs. Warburton is to seek a divorce to marry you. I could not wish her greater misfortune. Now will you shoot?"

"No."

Neyland passionately threw the pistol from him.

"I cannot shoot an unarmed man even though I hate him as much as I hate you. We are equal now. You beat me last night. Today may be another story."

"No," said Warburton. "We are not equal. I am as much your master physically as I am mentally and every other way. With me a promise is a promise. You are safe from me."

Neyland thought to spring at him but the moral courage of the stronger man daunted the weaker. After a moment of hesitation Warburton deliberately turned his back on Neyland and walked away. The latter ran across the road and picked up the pistol. In his mad passion his first thought had been to turn it on himself, but there was Chrissey. After a few moments of indecision he thrust the weapon back in his pocket and went toward the hotel. He found a note there from her. She told him what he had just learned from Warburton, that she was going to seek a divorce and that she was leaving on the *Bermudian* in the morning. He must not attempt to communicate with her or to see her on the island. He must go home on some other ship. It was a cold note and yet the postscript gave him some comfort. It ran this way:

Oh, my dear, my love and life, will there ever be any happiness for me, for you? Come to me in New York, at the Tayloes before I go west.

It was as if she had written the cold, reserved, formal note under terrible constraint and at the

end had permitted herself to be swept away by a wave of passion. It was the only comfort Neyland got out of the whole situation. He had been beaten physically by Warburton on the terrace at night. He had been cowed mentally by Warburton on the driveway in the morning. He was denied access to the woman he loved, through whom, he most unjustly thought, all his humiliation had come upon him, and there was but one brief sentence upon which he could build any hope.

Well, there was one refuge left him. He had kept straight so long. In his agony and shame and abandonment he fell again and great was the fall of him. A few days thereafter a tramp steamer bound for Charleston touched at the port. The wretched, sodden, bleary-eyed, broken-souled, wreck of humanity bought passage on her back to the United States.

As Chrissey Warburton stood on the bridge of the *Bermudian* that winter morning there swept into her vision off to starboard a great white, swiftly-moving pleasure cruiser. It needed no second glance to tell her that it was the *Christianna*. On her bridge stood Warburton. He knew the *Bermudian* perfectly. He had sailed nearly twelve hours later than the steamer, the yacht not having arrived at her departure, but he had driven the *Christianna* as he had never attempted to drive her namesake, and they were coming into New York Harbour together.

Was he aware of the small, fur-clad figure on the bridge of the passenger steamer? She looked long and earnestly at him but he only stared straight ahead, as they swept up the harbour, side by side as before, but now on different ships.

CHAPTER XXIII

"LA DONNA É MOBILE"

"*SIGNORINA*," exclaimed the little Duke, "pardon, *Signora* I should say."

"*Signorina* will do," returned Chrissey Warburton. "Coming events you know," she laughed harshly.

The Duke did not understand. Chrissey Warburton had been ushered into the morning room of the Tayloe apartment into which the Duke had also come by chance. It was another evidence of Warburton's forethought which intensified her bitterness that she had been met at the wharf by Warburton's secretary with her car. She would have refused it but she was not quite ready for the open scandal yet, although she had noted the man's surprise when she ordered him to drive to the Tayloe apartment on Park Avenue rather than her own home.

She had not said anything about her coming to the Tayloes. She was not expected, of course. The Colonel had gone down to the Trust Company of which he was the president and Rose was just getting dressed for a reception, so Chrissey

Warburton had been left alone for a little time until the Duke came. Into the room at this juncture burst Rose herself.

"My dear Chris," she cried, taking her in her arms and smiling broadly at the Duke over her friend's head. Then she held her off and looked at her. "Why Chris, what have you done to yourself? We thought you'd come back completely restored. You actually look worse than when you left us," she ran on, in her surprise and anxiety, forgetting the probable effect of what she was saying.

"The Signora Warburton is tired from the journey," suggested the Duke.

"It isn't that," answered the newcomer. "I might as well tell you right away."

"My dear," interposed Rose Tayloe quickly, suspecting what had happened and anxious to prevent words which might be difficult to unsay and which in calmer moods might not be said at all, "don't tell us anything now. I was going out with the Duke to the Dennison reception, but you won't take it amiss if we don't go, Enrico?"

"Most certainly not. The reception is nothing. Your first duty is to your friend. *Signora*, permit me." He took her hand and kissed it in his old world way. "I shall leave you. The opera to-night, *Signorina*?"

"I shan't go," said Rose quickly.

"Yes, you must, and I, too, if you will take me," said her friend promptly.

"We shall be honoured," said the Duke.

"Perhaps not after you hear."

"Oh, Chrissey, don't speak now. Wait."

"I must."

"I shall withdraw and leave you and my Rose alone."

"No, you must hear. The sooner everybody hears it the better. Don't stop me. You called me *Signorina*, a moment since, Duke. I intend to be that."

"You mean?"

"A divorce."

"Oh, Chris!"

"*Signora*, think what you do."

"Mr. Warburton himself suggested it."

"Impossible," cried Rose. "Why he worships the ground you walk on."

"I hate him," answered the wife dry eyed and hard, closing her mouth resolutely.

"But why?"

"Does one know why one hates or why one loves?" was the answer. "We cannot live together and so I shall get a divorce."

"It's that wretched Dick Neyland who is at the bottom of this," said Rose.

"How dare you speak of him in that way?" burst out the other, aflame to defend the man she loved.

"Then it is he."

"I am going to marry him when the law sets me free."

"But the Church," said Rose.

"Can the Church sanctify a union like mine and John Warburton's?"

"Perhaps not, but can it sanctify one between you and Richard Neyland?"

"I shall do without its sanction then," answered the woman. "I tried it once. This time I shall try the State."

"But no State is above God, *Signora*," said the Duke gravely.

"Not in your religion perhaps but——"

"In no religion," persisted Attavanti. "*Signora*, have you thought, have you considered? What says your own beautiful service? 'For better, for worse——'"

"Don't quote that at me. The Priest has already done so. I am young, my life is before me. I am a woman to be wooed and won, not to be bought and possessed; to be loved and cared for, not to be taken and held. I have a right to my happiness even as you have a right to yours. If not with Richard Neyland then some other."

"Oh, Chris, think!"

"Do you think I haven't? Do you think I haven't agonized? It's settled. I've decided. It was his own suggestion anyway. He's not half a man to me. If he had seized me, mastered me that night—if he had beaten me I might——"

"Don't let's talk about it any more now, dear, you're overwrought, you need rest, you——"

"I shall not be a recluse. I don't care what people say or how soon they learn it, the sooner

the better. If you and the Colonel would rather not be mixed up in it I'll go to a hotel. I'll have to fight the battle alone anyway."

"You must stay here. Father wouldn't have it otherwise, nor would I."

"Very well, then. My maid will soon be here with my trunks. If you will keep me until I can make arrangements to go west I shall be very grateful to you. And now may I go to my room? I want to be in good trim for tonight. What is the opera?"

"*Rigoletto* with Caruso, Farrar and Amato, Signora."

"Good, I love the opera. '*La Donna é Mobile*.'" She made a brave attempt to hum the air. "'How fickle women are!'" she laughed. "We all know that, Duke."

"I will show you to your room, Chris," said Rose. "Wait for me here, Duke."

"No," said Chrissey, "I know your apartment perfectly. Which room is it?"

"It's the front guest room on the next floor."

"Very well, you stay here with the Duke. There's my maid outside the door now. You can send her to me and——"

"But I must go with you."

"No. I won't hear of it."

She escaped, thrusting Rose gently back and mounted the stairs of the duplex apartment with a light foot if heavy heart.

"And so the Signora Warburton would be free,"

said the Duke quietly. "It is very sad, indeed, that she finds out that she does not love her husband—too late," he added shaking his head mournfully.

Into Rose Tayloe's mind shot a sudden suspicion. She looked at the little Duke. She noticed his bent head, his deep thought. The suspicion grew to a certainty. She slowly slipped the glove from her left hand, more slowly she drew from the third finger a superb solitaire. She laid it gently on the table.

"*Signore*," she said softly, striving to speak with even voice but with rather ill success, and when Attavanti looked at her in surprise he noticed that her eyes were filled with tears.

"What is this?" he exclaimed, taking a step toward her.

She met his movement by a backward step, which kept them still apart.

"Your ring," she said, pointing to the table.

The Duke lifted it up, examined it carefully, stared at her in wonderment.

"Do you find it not to your liking?" he asked in pained amazement.

No answer.

"Is there a flaw in the stone?"

Still silence.

"Or the donor?" he added, compressing his lips and looking very strangely at her.

"Neither," she answered at last.

"What then?"

"Your freedom."

"My freedom?"

"Yes."

"Why? Have I displeased you? Have I failed? Have I——?"

"There is Chrissey de Selden. She will be free too. You loved her before."

"My Rose," said the little Italian passionately. "Why do you pierce my heart with these wild words? What have I done that you should treat me like this?"

"You said 'too late.' You looked——"

The Duke was unique among his people, perhaps it was a quality he had acquired in his travels, but he possessed a keen sense of humour. He laughed. Rose Tayloe possessed a sense of humour too, but it was in abeyance then.

"How dare you laugh at me when my heart is breaking?" she cried.

She sank down in the chair and hid her face in her hands and this time the tears did come forth. The Duke liked her best when she sat down and he stood up. Then he could look down upon her but this time the advantage was foregone. He knelt by her side and looked up at her.

"My Rose," he said in his broken English, "do you think that after I had known and loved you there could be any other woman in the world for me?"

"But Chrissey Warburton is so——"

"You know I am thankful every hour I pass in

your presence that she would have none of me, that her rejection of me gave me a chance to know you, but even if I had not known you there is still a barrier."

"And what is that?"

"In my Church and in accordance with the custom of my house, marriage is for life. I could not hand down to my children the great traditions of the Attavanti through a woman who had been divorced."

"But if it were so and you could, what then?"

"My Rose, my beautiful Rose, my Rose of the world," said the Duke earnestly, "how can I assure you? I sympathize deeply with the *Signora*. I have deep admiration for her and much respect for her, but you,"—he rose to his feet and put his arm about her shoulder, turned her face up toward him,—"look at me. With the *Signora Warburton* it would be impossible, but were you in her place I am afraid I should have a hard battle for Church and family. No. The good God has given your heart to me and you have taken mine by storm. I would not change places with all men in the world so long as you are mine." He bent his head and kissed away the tears. Then he kissed her on her upturned lips. "*Carissima mia*, you will take back the ring now? See. I put it on your pretty hand again. It is less pure, less beautiful than you, and the fire that shines from it is cold to that which burns in my heart."

It was very extravagant. It was entirely

un-American. It was extremely foreign. Yet it was very comforting to Rose Tayloe. She leaned back on the Duke's breast, glad that she was sitting down and looking up at him who boasted not so many inches but every one of them a lover and a man.

"You shall never sing '*La Donna é Mobile*' about me," she whispered.

CHAPTER XXIV

DISAPPROVAL

CHRISSEY Warburton and Colonel Tayloe had a long talk that night between the dinner and the opera. For that function she dressed herself in her most magnificent gown. Her rare, clear, cold complexion, almost transparent like light exquisite egg-shell china, had been one of Chrissey Warburton's charms. She decided that this was the night she could not be pale and for almost the first time in her life she came down with a vivid colour which did not naturally inhere in her cheeks and which somehow changed her whole appearance. If she could have blondined her dark hair in so brief a time in her reckless mood she might have tried it. She wanted to be another woman outwardly as well as inwardly, physically as well as mentally, and her conversation like her colour was vivid and sparkling as well as unnatural.

The old Colonel looked upon her intended course with frank disapproval. He did not hesitate to express it in the library.

"You are doing wrong; morally and from every other point of view. I have known John Warbur-

ton for half a score of years. I knew your father well. I have known Neyland ever since he was a boy and his father before him. He comes legitimately by all his failings. His father was stricken to death and his ending was the natural sequence of his life. His mother died in a retreat." This was much from the Colonel, who would fain not speak ill of the dead especially in the case of a woman. "I have never blamed him much. He is a man of brilliant parts and if he only had stability and resisting power he could be anything. The way he has conserved the remnant of his father's fortune that was left him and even increased it in spite of his dissipations shows his head for business. I want to be just to him. His brilliant adventure, his soldiering, his exploring, have demonstrated his capacity. It is the weakness of his will that ruins him. He can't resist temptation. He will never be anything different, I fear, though I don't let him know that. Drink is his undoing."

"But with me."

"He will only drag you down too."

"I can uplift him."

"Women since time and the world began have said and thought that," observed the Colonel savagely, "but I am older and more experienced than you. It is impossible."

"I would rather fail with him than succeed with another."

"Do you love him so much?"

"I love him enough to have forgiven him Sorrento. I love him enough to be sensible of his weaknesses and yet to continue to love him. I love him enough to believe that with me he will be different."

"And Warburton. Now there is a man, strong, able, clean."

"I admit everything you say but if he were an angel and I did not love him——"

"You might learn if you would only put Neyland out of your head and try."

"He is not in my head, Colonel, he is in my heart. I could manage my head but not my heart."

"Nonsense."

"No, it is not nonsense. Think back to the days when you were young, and besides I hate John Warburton as much for his perfections as anything else. There has been but one time when I felt any different."

"And when was that?"

"Down in Bermuda on the veranda when he would have killed Mr. Neyland but for my interference."

The Colonel threw up his hands. He did not voice his thoughts but it was in his mind to ask why she had interfered. Chrissey Warburton read that thought.

"Poor Richard, even his friends! Though all the world be against him I will——"

"When a woman makes up her mind," said the

Colonel, shaking his head gloomily, "I suppose that is the end of it."

"Yes. Now I want nothing from Mr. Warburton but my freedom. He is trustee of my fortune. Will you act in that capacity? I mean, will you attend to the legal business of having it put in my own control and advise me what I shall do with it?"

"Of course," said the Colonel. "I hate to do it but it had better be I than——"

"Do you mean Mr. Neyland?"

"No, no, I mean strangers and——"

"Under the circumstances it couldn't possibly be Mr. Neyland."

"Certainly not."

"And that's why I chose you."

"And if you persist in this mad course it will be easy to effect the change from me to whomsoever you will later."

"Thank you."

"Now there is one thing more. I think I have earned the right to say any reasonable thing to you and some unreasonable ones, too, perhaps."

"You have every right."

"Thank you. I want you to stay right here while you are in New York. I want to give you whatever counsel and protection I can for your sake, for the sake of your father and mother, and for the sake of John Warburton as well."

He was going to say it would be Warburton's wish but she interrupted him quickly.

"Leave him out please. He no longer counts."

"Very well," said the Colonel, "I advise you, I even implore you, to avail yourself of our hospitality, but I feel compelled to suggest that under the circumstances it would be better if Richard Neyland did not call upon you here."

Chrissey sprang to her feet, for a moment she was impelled to protest with vehemence, to declare that she would not remain where her lover could not come. The Colonel realized the meaning of her impetuous movement.

"My dear," he said, taking her firmly by the shoulders, "you must see the propriety of this. You must be governed by me in this. It only arises from my care for your good name. I do not want you coupled publicly with any man until——"

"It's hard," said the woman slowly, "but I suppose you are right. It shall be as you say. Mr. Neyland will be coming back from Bermuda shortly."

"I suppose so. I will endeavour to see him first and tell him."

"Will you tell him to write me?"

"I can't exclude him from the United States mails," said the Colonel grimly.

The next day the Colonel had a bad quarter of an hour with Warburton at his office in the Warburton Trust Company.

"Look here, John, you don't know how I feel about this whole affair. You don't know how I

have tried to make your wife see. She won't listen to me."

"I beg you not to influence her."

"But, good God, man, you're so much older than she."

"To my sorrow, yes."

"Can't you do something?"

"Nothing."

"And you wouldn't if you could, would you?" burst out the Colonel wrathfully.

"No, you remember before we were married you asked me if she loved me. It was a natural question but I never asked her. I was afraid to. I knew she didn't. I thought I could make her love me. I can't. You and Mrs. Tayloe were perfectly mated, devoted to one another. You don't know what a hell it is to be married without mutual affection. I pass for a cold, reserved man and I suppose I am, but no torture could equal what I have gone through for a month." The great head bent down for a moment. The broad brow rested against a clenched hand. "And if it has been a hell for me who loved her what must it have been for her? Indeed I know what it must have been. I have had evidence of it."

"Evidence?"

"Yes. I believe you and she are the only persons on earth, now that Mrs. de Selden is dead, who know the secret of my birth."

"If the whole world had known, you have lived it down. You have made your name."

Coming from the Colonel, who valued family and ancestry above everything, this was a great admission.

"It isn't that," said Warburton. "In the passion of her hatred of me and her devotion to Neyland when I said she dishonoured my name she replied——"

"Impossible!" exclaimed the Colonel.

"She said I had no name," said Warburton. "And that it was that opened my eyes to her feelings. I told her to get a divorce. I have but one regret save the eternal one that I cannot win her love."

"And what is that?"

"That she should give her affection to a man like Neyland."

"I know all about him. He will never be anything but what he is now, I fear."

"And in leaving me for him she exchanges one misery for another and by heaven she loses by the exchange."

"Why don't you keep her then?"

"I can't. She has made her choice. I don't want to refer to this ever again, Colonel. First the Priest and now you. I will never get over this. Oh, I don't mean that I'll die or do myself any harm. I'm not that kind, but I have loved that girl ever since she has been a woman and before. I think everything I possess, everything the future holds for me, can not compensate for this. My God, Colonel, do you think I could give her up to

any one if I didn't love her as I do. I think if her happiness were not above everything I would kill him, yes, and her, too."

"It might be better if you did one of these things, or both," said the Colonel. "Well, we'll not talk about it any more. About her estate, her securities?"

"I have had them all prepared for transfer to her own care. She could have had them when she came of age but she preferred to let me administer them as usual."

"She wants you to turn them over to me."

"Very well. You know her fortune is by no means inconsiderable. Her father left about a million to his wife and daughter and I have here the report of my expert accountant, the amount is now between five and six millions and all in first-class negotiable securities. The formal details of the transfer shall be arranged between our lawyers and any alimony——"

"She wouldn't take a cent. She charged me to receive nothing but her own."

"That is like her. Everything here is her own legitimately. One more question before we dismiss the subject. What are her plans?"

"I do not quite know. She had not decided but I think she intends to go west."

"Reno?"

"Yes, as soon as possible."

"She is in a hurry," said Warburton bitterly.

"Well, I can understand."

"And there is one thing I also want to say before we dismiss the subject. There is going to be no love-making in my house."

Warburton nodded. He understood what was back of the old Colonel's remarks.

"Now if you please we will go over the securities and thereafter we will not refer to the affair again. By the way, when will Rose and the Duke be married?"

"Early in January, the seventh," said the Colonel. "The Duke's leave of absence is about to expire and they have agreed on that date."

"And Rose goes to Italy, I presume?"

"Yes. I don't know what I'll do without her."

"Colonel, you only rent your apartment. Come and live with me."

"Are you going to keep up that big Fifth Avenue house?"

"Yes, but I shall be terribly lonely there and it would be a real charity if you would come. We shall be two old men together."

"You, an old man!" said the Colonel, shaking his white head and looking down at the colossal American.

"A man is old when his hopes are dead and the joy of life is gone. You are a mere boy beside me," answered the other bitterly.

CHAPTER XXV

ENCOURAGEMENT

PEOPLE of such prominence as the Warburtons could not live apart in New York without arousing comment. It soon became known that the wife was with the Tayloes while her husband dwelt in the big Fifth Avenue house. Rumour was instantly busy with the possibilities of the situation. Warburton refused to see interviewers and they could get no access to his wife, while Colonel Tayloe drove them from him with vehement contempt. Subtle insinuations appeared in such papers as *The Gossip of the Town*, not libelous, not actionable, incapable of disavowal, but none the less unmistakably pointing to Warburton and his wife.

And one of them fell under the notice of Mrs. Billy Alton. There was a formal acquaintance between the Warburtons, the Tayloes, and the Altons. They moved in the same circle, but there was no intimacy between the families. Neyland found Alton a congenial companion and that well-meaning but misguided and misguiding young man had been the recipient of Neyland's confidence, especially when the latter had been in his cups.

Of all Neyland's friends Alton only had been aware of that visit to Bermuda. Neyland, whose continued absence was inexplicable, was evidently the cause of the trouble between Warburton and his wife.

Like the tailless fox the much-divorced Altons would fain see other people in their condition. They talked the matter over and decided that friendship for Neyland warranted them in entering the game to do that young man a good turn. Alton himself was the more ready because he was on the side of that group of rich men which inevitably opposed Warburton. While Alton had never actively engaged in business his friends, those who saw beneath his careless indifference to things material, were confident that his talents were great enough to make him a formidable operator on the exchange. However, he had no present intention of engaging in combat with Warburton in that way, but his position made him the more willing to do what he could in behalf of Neyland.

"You know these Tayloes," said his wife as they discussed the situation, "you know what a stiff-necked, holier-than-thou crowd they train with. Why at the Jenitan dinner-dance the bow I got from Rose Tayloe would have made an iceberg look hot, it was so cold. They're painfully old-fashioned and behind the times."

"Yes, I know," remarked her husband. "The Colonel is a good old chap but his morals are hopelessly out of date."

"Exactly. And you can just imagine what a time that poor thing is having with them, especially with that young Dago dangling around after Rose with his peculiar Italian ideas about marriage and divorce."

"Oh, Attavanti is a good sort," observed Mr. Alton, "but he's as old-fashioned as his title on the main issue. Just think if we had been as foolishly scrupulous we should never have had——"

"Each other," ecstatically exclaimed Mrs. Alton, giving Billy a warm hug and fervent kiss to show her appreciation of the present situation, which had not yet begun to pall on either of them. "You know I never knew a real man till I met you, Billy."

"Nor I a real woman until you fell into my arms."

Which was very satisfactory to both of them so far as it went. That both of them had made use of the same expressions to other persons was not a matter of any moment.

"Well, I'm going to help her," said Mrs. Alton when the loving pair had extricated themselves from each other's arms.

"How?"

"I'll ask her here for a little dinner."

"Whom will you have to meet her? You know she doesn't fancy the live ones we gather around our festive board."

"I'll ask nobody to meet her except you, and I

wouldn't ask you if I didn't think you could help, too."

"Thank you very much. Help to what?"

"Help to persuade her to take her chance of happiness."

"Well," said Billy, "of course that means Dick Neyland and you know Dick."

"Yes, I know him but you drink yourself some times, Billy. I've seen you fuller than a goat," was her inelegant reply, "but it doesn't make me love you any less and as for myself I'd rather have Dick Neyland even if he does go on sprees once in a while than that cold-blooded old Warburton."

"Look here, Becky, I'll cut out cocktails, et cetera, if you will."

"No, you won't," promptly retorted the vivacious Mrs. Alton. "I had one husband who nearly drank himself to death and in desperation I took another who never touched the stuff. Life was as bad with one as the other. That's one reason why I chose you. You're betwixt and between, you see."

"You'd better be careful," laughed her husband, flattered by the position in which she had assigned him, "you may drive me to total abstinence or the other."

"Not much. You're going to keep in the middle of the road so long as I'm looking out for you."

"And how long will that be?"

"Till I get tired of you."

"And when will that be?"

"I don't know. If we judge the future by the past——"

"Don't say any more," interrupted Mr. Alton grimly, "you've said enough."

"Meanwhile," interposed his wife, "we'll enjoy the day and we'll help poor Chrissey Warburton to enjoy hers."

"Bet you two to one she won't come."

"Done for a hundred. You know a lot about women, Billy, but you don't know everything. If she's in the mood I think she is, and I'm gambling that hundred on it, she'll be anxious to get next to a woman like me."

Mrs. Alton said this with quite an air of pride. She had enjoyed experiences. Out of the kindness of her heart she wished to place them at the disposal of her more untutored sister. Chrissey Warburton was very much surprised to receive an invitation from Mrs. Alton to dinner the next night.

"There will be no one here except Mr. Alton and I do so want to see you, to know you better," the note said.

Chrissey jumped to the conclusion that the Altons had heard from Neyland. The fact that she had not, had begun to prey upon her. Besides, Becky Alton had been through the mill and could advise her. Ordinarily she would have declined the invitation as a piece of presumption on the part of Mrs. Alton, for whom she had entertained feel-

ings of contempt, but now it was different. A similar purpose makes us wondrous kind to that which we have despised. The messenger who brought the invitation carried back an acceptance.

It so happened that on the morning of the day appointed for this dinner Richard Neyland, very much worse for, shall we say wear? presented himself at the office Billy Alton maintained more as a luxury than for any other purpose in the Woolworth Building.

"Speaking of angels," began Billy.

"The devil, rather," interposed Neyland bitterly.

"Where have you been and why didn't you get here before?"

"Oh, I had one hell of a time in Bermuda with the usual results. I found myself on a tramp steamer bound for Charleston. Took me several days to get in any condition to get up here."

"I suppose it was about the Warburtons."

"Yes, of course. Who knows it?"

"Nobody knows anything definite but there's been a lot of newspaper innuendo."

"Where is she?"

"At the Tayloes."

"I must get myself in shape somehow and go to see her."

"Wouldn't do that if I were you, Dick. To tell the truth, from what has been whispered around old Colonel Tayloe isn't any too well affected

toward this new idea and you might find it difficult to—er—you understand.”

“But Chrissey Warburton would see me anywhere.”

“She couldn’t very well if Tayloe didn’t desire you to use his apartment for——”

“I’ll write to her then.”

“Now, old man, first let me tell you something. From the looks of you you couldn’t write a letter that anybody could read. You’re knocked out. You need a good bracer and you’ve got to get your bearings again. Why can’t you drink like me instead of going into it like a regular hog?”

“Look here, Alton, I didn’t come here to be lectured by you.”

“No, but you’re going to get the straight truth from me. If you could drink like a gentleman I wouldn’t say a word but you can’t. You go right down to the gutter every time you touch it. You’d better cut it out altogether.”

“When I want your advice I’ll come for it.”

“You’ll get it without coming for it. Your only safety is total abstinence.”

“Is Saul also among the prophets?” sneered Neyland.

“He is. Even the devil can quote Scripture on occasion, you know. But that’s neither here nor there. You’re old enough to look after yourself.”

“Thank you and I propose to do so.”

“Your success in the past doesn’t greatly encourage me to——”

"What the devil are you driving at?"

"At you."

"I've had enough of it."

"Sit down, man," said Alton as Neyland rose to go. "I can do you a service."

"What service?"

"You want to see Mrs. Warburton, don't you?"

"Of course."

"Well, come to my house at nine tonight, but for heaven's sake get in some kind of shape between now and then. Dope or doctor or whatever it is."

"You mean Mrs. Warburton is going to dine with Mrs. Alton and you?"

"Yes, quite *en famille*, all alone."

"I didn't know she was a friend of your wife's."

"She isn't. I think she looked down on good old Becky but she is contemplating the same sort of a career and when my wife invited her she fell for it at once. Nobody knows more about the game than Becky," continued Mr. Alton with obvious pride in his accomplished wife. "Now get yourself in decent shape and happen in and perhaps you will hear something to your advantage."

"Alton, you've said things I wouldn't let anybody else say to me but you're a good friend, just the same," said Neyland. "I'll go to see Dr. Alberg, he'll shoot something into me, and I'll take a Turkish bath, and I'll turn up all right."

"Good," said Alton. "It'll surprise the lady, but I guess agreeably."

Becky Alton, as might have been surmised from her career, was a woman who went at things by the most direct route. She received her guest in the drawing-room into which Mr. Alton, carefully coached for the occasion, had not yet entered.

"My dear," she said, assuming that her familiarity would be acceptable and presuming on what she believed to be her guest's intention, "I saw you at the opera the other night. Your face has fairly haunted me ever since. When I learned," she went on recklessly, drawing a bow at a venture, "that you and Mr. Warburton had separated and that you intended applying for a divorce, I just couldn't resist the temptation to seek to know you better and to help you to get some of the happiness floating around."

It was a bold and daring thing to say. If that arrow shot at random did not strike the mark there would be an outburst of indignation from Mrs. Warburton, and the budding intimacy would end right there. The bold adventurer was gratified to see that her courage had carried her safely over the dangerous situation. Although Chrissey Warburton experienced an intense revulsion of feeling and felt a positive aversion toward her hostess she did not exhibit any resentment. She had come there for a purpose and she was not going away without carrying out her intention. Still the blunt declaration took her greatly aback.

"How do you know so much?" she faltered.
"I thought that only the Tayloes——"

"Well, of course there's Dick Neyland, you know he's Billy's most intimate friend."

"Is he back?" asked Chrissey, half in terror, half in joy.

"I haven't seen him, but he's sure to turn up sooner or later. We both know, everybody knows, that that boy is just crazy about you. In fact he went down to Bermuda, so he told Billy, on purpose to persuade you."

"Has he written anything about the terrible things that happened there?"

"Nothing. What happened?" The question was a little too blunt and Mrs. Alton was quick enough to recover herself before the other could answer. "But of course that is none of my affair. I only thought you needed the assistance of someone who had been through the mill and—my dear, if you could realize how happy Billy and I are you wouldn't hesitate a minute about that divorce."

"I'm not hesitating."

"Good. I've tried it twice before and Billy has too, and we know that there's nothing so wretched as being married to someone you can't get along with, who doesn't consider you at all, who selfishly wants you to minister to his pleasure, and to whom your happiness is nothing. If I'd only met Billy before the others I would never have had to go through this and he says the same thing."

Whether or not Mrs. Alton believed these

assertions did not appear. At any rate, she spoke with supreme confidence and satisfaction.

"Dick Neyland has his faults, as every man has, but with a woman like you to guide him he would be a different fellow. All he needs is a strong will, a loving heart and I'm persuaded you could give him those."

"Yes, yes, I suppose so."

"As for John Warburton, Billy hates him and so do I and Billy's about the most easy-going chap on earth. If he hates any one it's because he must be thoroughly dislikable. He has confessed he always did hate Mr. Glitton and Mr. Harberd, my—er—the others, you know. He says Warburton is as hard as nails and as cold as an ice-berg. You never could be happy with him. What you want is love, even if it is not so awfully respectable, and Mr. Neyland will give you that. He worships the ground you walk on."

"I know, but if you please let us not talk of that any more."

"Of course not. When it's been said once it's been said for all time. Besides I want to help you. What place are you thinking of going to? Nevada?"

"Yes."

"Well, I know the nicest place in Reno, a lovely little house on the outskirts of the town and in the best section. It is kept by a widow who only receives one guest at a time. She simply acts as housekeeper. I have been there twice, and the

second time was even more satisfactory than the first. I happen to know that the house is vacant now and if you have fully decided to go——”

“I have absolutely.”

“I’ll have Billy telegraph and reserve it for you.”

“What is it you want me to do?” asked Billy Alton entering opportunely.

“Billy, you’ve met Mrs. Warburton, of course.”

“I’ve had that great pleasure.”

“She wants you to telegraph to Mrs. Lashbury in Reno, you know, the place where you wrote to me. She wants to reserve her house.”

“Delighted, I’m sure,” said Billy. “Shall I do it now?”

Mrs. Warburton was fairly swept away by the kindly zeal and willingness of her host and hostess. Yet having decided, what was the use of delay?

“If you please, Mr. Alton,” she said at last.

“Good,” exclaimed Mrs. Alton. “And Billy, you better wire through your lawyers to Hawkins and Henshaw. They are the best lawyers in Reno, my dear. I have had them twice, I know them perfectly well. You go to them, my dear. They are to be depended upon absolutely. Tell them you are sending another client, Billy, and ask them to reserve Mrs. Lashbury’s house for her. When are you thinking of starting?”

“The sooner the better,” answered the desperate woman.

"Exactly. It has always been my practice when I had a disagreeable thing like that to do to get it over with. Of course, people will talk. They will talk more in your case because Mr. Warburton is so much richer and more prominent than either Mr. Glitton or Mr. Harberd or even than Billy."

That was about all Mrs. Warburton could stand. It was quite evident Mrs. Alton was as shrewd as she was various. She turned to her husband.

"Go to the telephone and call up your attorneys and have them send the wire at once, Billy," she said while Chrissey waited, thoroughly ashamed of herself, frightfully humiliated at the situation, in which she had the sorry consciousness that she had deliberately placed herself on Becky Alton's level.

No wonder that she shed a few tears. Now Becky Alton was not all bad. Indeed, she was a kind-hearted woman. Nor had she completely forgot her own sensations when she had been about to take the first plunge. She really sympathized with her forlorn sister and it was with a touch of genuine feeling that she took her in her arms.

"I know how you feel," she whispered, pressing the head of the smaller woman against her breast. "I felt the same way myself once. But what's the use? We've only got one life to live. We've a right to all the happiness we can get out of it and nothing can be worse than being married to a man you don't love."

"I hate him," whispered Chrissey Warburton brokenly. "I hate him but I don't know——"

"Don't go any further than that. You love somebody else, just take him and keep him as long as you love him and if he doesn't measure up try it again. Billy's the best boy on earth and it looks like eternity now but if he should not be the man for me——" she shrugged her shoulders cynically in a way that would not have pleased her present husband surely.

Chrissey looked at her with some of the horror of her soul in her face.

"You needn't look at me that way," said the other woman, who was not so very much older than she after all. "You will come to understand it when you have gone through what I've gone through. At present you think Mr. Neyland is the only man on earth for you and may be he is, but if he isn't don't stop with him, get rid of him and try someone else. If it's Billy for me I will be in great luck but if it isn't I'm not going to fool away what remains of my youth on him. I'm going to be happy if I die for it and as it generally takes some man to make us women happy I'm going to keep on until I get the right one."

"I haven't heard a word from Mr. Neyland since I left Bermuda."

"There must be some good reason for that," said Mrs. Alton, "for I know and Billy knows that ever since he's seen you he hasn't cared for anything else."

"Except drinking."

"Well, most men divide allegiance between a woman and a bottle. If you can keep him away from it he's the finest fellow on earth. Hush, here comes Billy. Turn your head away and dry your eyes, I'll meet him at the door."

"Telegram sent," said Billy. "Everything's arranged. If I can be of any more service to you," he continued talking to Mrs. Warburton's back over his wife's shoulder, "you need only to command me, you know, tickets, trains and——"

"Thank you," answered the unhappy woman, "I think probably Colonel Tayloe will attend to everything for me," she went on bravely, struggling for control. "He is displeased but personally he is very kind."

"Dinner is served, madam," said the butler, appearing at the door.

CHAPTER XXVI

CROSSING THE RUBICON

It would have been a Barmecide feast indeed but for the vivacity of the hostess. In her efforts at sparkling conversation she was ably seconded by her husband whose powers in that direction were not to be disdained. Chrissey Warburton strove hard to follow her hostess' lead and at last entered into the conversation, which grew daring and bold to the limit, with an utterly reckless abandon.

They were still at the table lingering over the coffee when a card was put into the hostess' hand. She looked at it, opened her eyes widely with well-acted surprise, considered it thoughtfully for a moment, and then passed it to her guest.

"It's from Dick Neyland for Mrs. Warburton," she said to her husband. "Will you see him, my dear?"

"Did you arrange this when you invited me?" she asked, her heart giving a great leap.

Was reproach or joy in her voice? For all her keenness Mrs. Alton could not tell.

"I can answer that," said Billy truthfully. "We didn't know where he was when we invited you.

He blew into my office this morning. I thought first of inviting him to dine with us but it occurred to me that it might not be agreeable to you, so I told him to call at nine and send in his card."

"I'll see him, of course."

"You will excuse us, Billy," said Mrs. Alton rising. "Come this way, Chris," venturing upon the bold use of her new found friend's name as if to cement the alliance, "and you must call me Becky, like all my friends."

She led the way along the hall and pointed to the door of the morning-room, into which she had previously given instructions that Mr. Neyland should be ushered, and turned away. Chrissey laid her hand on the door. For a moment she hesitated to open it. It was a crisis in her fortunes. There was still time for retreat in spite of the telegram which had been sent. There had been no irremediable publicity as yet, neither her name nor Alton's appearing in the telegram, but if she opened that door it would be the crossing of the Rubicon.

She trembled on the verge of the irretraceable step. She hesitated. Perhaps if Warburton had been by she might not have been lost. The next instant she was in Neyland's arms.

The room was poorly illuminated. Heavy shades covered the electric lights. She could not see clearly and distinctly the face of her lover. The doctor, the valet, and the dope, whatever it was, had worked wonders with him. Although the

ravages of his latest departure would have been apparent in broad day they were not so evident in that dimly lighted room, and besides she was in his arms. Her eyes were misted with tears. His kisses covered her face. She could neither see nor think clearly.

The first burst of happiness that she had known since that day they rode a-horseback through the enchantments of that island paradise came into her heart. It was not perfect happiness. She found herself, singularly enough and to her great dissatisfaction, remembering Warburton even in Neyland's arms and finally she gently thrust him from her and extricated herself.

"Why didn't you come to me before?"

"I—er—couldn't leave on the *Bermudian*," he answered. "You forbade it. I caught a tramp steamer to Charleston. I was—delayed. I would have come to you at the Tayloes immediately but Billy advised me not to. He told me not to write either and that he would arrange for me to see you here tonight. What are you going to do for our future?"

"I'm going to Reno in a few days."

"And in a few months," he exclaimed as he caught her to his heart again, "you will belong to me."

"Yes," said the woman. "It's my only chance for happiness."

"If I can bring it about, you know——"

"I know your intention, Richard," she said at

last, "your desire to serve me, but oh, I don't know your will."

"If it were as great as my love," he cried, "it could achieve anything."

"Ah, but that is the question." He stood before her in great humility as she went on. "I want to be proud of the man I love, to whom I give myself. I do not know how long it takes to get a divorce in Nevada but I suppose it will be six months. I'm going to make conditions."

"Anything."

"For six months you must not touch a drop of anything. You have it in you to do great things."

"I have done some things in the field of adventure and exploration."

"Yes, I know. You have played a man's part in difficult situations but there is no more difficult situation for a man like you," she went on with rare insight and merciless severity, "than here in New York. You must conquer here. When my divorce is granted and we are married——"

"May God bless you for those words," said the man using the natural figure of speech to express human gratitude without in the least degree acknowledging God!

"I don't know about His blessing," said the woman dubiously, "but if I am to have happiness I must respect you as much as I love you. I believe in you."

"You are the only one who does."

"You must believe in yourself as much as I

believe in you," she went on. "You must stay right here and show yourself a man and a conqueror to whom I can look up as I could have looked up to John Warburton——"

"Don't," he cried.

"If I had loved him."

"But you don't love him?"

"Would I be here if I did?"

"No, of course not, but——"

"Would I have allowed you to take me in your arms if I had?"

"I am wrong to question you."

"Now this must be good-bye. I shall not see you again. I cannot. We both have battles to fight. Some day we will fight our battles together, but now we must fight them alone. I am going away day after tomorrow. You must not seek to see me."

"I can write?"

"Of course. I shall live for your letters but you must not come to Nevada. You must stay here and tell me what you do and how you succeed."

"Thrice is he armed," protested Neyland, "who fights for such a guerdon as you, Chrissey." That saying was used of him who had his quarrel justified, but the man had no hesitation in misapplying it. "I'm going up into the wilds of Labrador," he continued. "I shall be gone from civilization for two or three months. It will enable me to get in shape, to recover my strength before I return for your battle."

"You won't go into danger?"

"I shall be more careful of this poor life of mine now than ever before because it is yours," he answered tenderly. "But I want to break away from the present habit and that is the best way to do it. I'll fight until I'm strong enough to come back."

"And during those months?"

"I'll write you at every opportunity. I'll keep a journal and send it to you when occasion serves."

"Perhaps I will do the same," she said. "We will set down our secret thoughts each for the other. And what shall you do when you come back here?"

"I'll tell you then. I have certain plans but I'd rather not mention them now until I'm ready to carry them out."

"Very well. Now you must go."

"Oh, don't send me away. There are a thousand things I want to say."

"I must. You cannot know how I've been tried. Look at me."

She lifted the shade from the nearest lamp. He saw her face upon which her inward agony had written its traces and she saw his face, too, upon which other things were graven. With a sinking heart she looked at him. They confronted each other. There was something between them that held their glances. His head dropped.

"It's the last time," he gritted out desperately.

"I give you my word of honour I'll never touch it again."

"I will believe you," said the woman, forcing the expression to her lips, "and with that word of confidence you must go." He stretched out his arms toward her but she shook her head. "Not now. I was surprised a moment since, I was so lonely, but now no more, until you have the right."

He seized her hand and bent over it and kissed it, bowing before her as he might have bowed to a shrine, touching her hand as men handle things that are holy. She lifted her other hand above his head almost as if in benediction and then suddenly dropped it. She could give no benison. She could not even receive one. What she said was commonplace enough.

"You can get my new address from Mr. Alton. Good-bye."

At the word he was gone. She met Mrs. Alton in the hall.

"No," she said, "don't call Mr. Alton. Bid him good-bye and thank him for me. You have been very helpful and I am grateful."

Two days after when she entered her stateroom on the Twentieth Century Limited she found it filled with clusters of great red roses that spoke to her of Neyland and compensated her in some degree for the terrible loneliness and depression in her heart as the great train rolled out of the station on its way westward. She took no one

with her but her maid, who had been her faithful attendant for a long time. She left behind her, so she fancied, regrets, troubles, sorrows, shames, despairs. She strove to look ahead hopefully seeking love, joy, peace—the gifts of the Spirit she was about to repudiate and deny!

BOOK V
DIVORCED

CHAPTER XXVII

A BITTER TASTE

MORE often than not what a woman sets her mind on in the beginning she finds she does not wish in the end. This was especially true of Chrissey Warburton and her divorce. Having got it she did not want it! Not infrequently has it been observed that about the worst thing that can happen is to have our prayers answered literally.

After Mrs. John Warburton had been seven months in Nevada, on a certain day in early summer there had been put in her hands that decree of divorce she had sought, giving her permission to resume once more her maiden name, and behold it was as valueless a piece of paper as she had ever examined! The end of her ambition, the accomplishment of her desire, the fruition of her hope, not only brought her no joy but had filled her with a dissatisfaction as intense as had been her original craving. When her lawyer handed her the paper making her a free woman she had just self-control enough not to hand it back. Instead she had

thrust it in the pocket of her riding-coat and had left the room with the barest acknowledgment courtesy required.

Nothing could have been more hateful to her than the beginning of her life at Reno. Becky Alton's boast was that she always had friends there. She used to say that no matter when she might go there she was certain of congenial companionship with persons of her own social circle. The supply of seekers-after-freedom was inexhaustible. Becky would always be sure of a good time in Reno.

Out of the kindness of her heart Mrs. Alton had notified some of the temporary sojourners in the Nevada Mecca—lingerers whose time was not out at her departure and comers who had shortly before left New York—of the arrival in their midst of Chrissey Warburton. She had asked them to make it pleasant for the new member of the colony. And they were not only willing but anxious so to do.

Now Chrissey Warburton's pitiful plea had been for a happiness which she fancied she could get by following the off-with-the-old-on-with-the-new matrimonial policy. Yet she had not so completely abandoned herself to her desires as to have lost all pride and delicacy and refinement. The mad revels of the exotic set at Reno were not to her taste at all. They disgusted her not only with the active participants but with divorce itself. Since it was the lust for approaching freedom that

seemed to induce and warrant their abuse of it before it came.

At first in her desperation the poor tempest-tossed woman had made a few tentative efforts to enter into the wild and extravagant gaiety of the shocking set. But she did it with little heart and no real interest. She found it impossible and finally fled from it as from a pestilence.

"I was like that at first," Mrs. Alton remarked to her husband after reading about her new friend's actions in a letter from a friend in Reno. "It seemed horrible to me. I felt so sad the first time."

"But you got over it, I suppose," observed Billy grimly, not entering into his wife's feelings as approvingly as usual.

"Yes, of course. It was quite different the second time. I was the maddest of the mad then," she continued reminiscently. "Now if I ever went to Reno again——"

"There isn't going to be any again, Becky," protested Billy.

"I hope not but you never can tell. Three times and—that's almost a habit," laughed Mrs. Billy lightly, at which the only proper comment that occurred to her husband were the two expressive monosyllables.

"Oh damn!"

But Chrissey Warburton had not got that far yet and in her disgust she fled. That disgust was catholic. It included Warburton, Neyland, her-

self, and society. And that it was illogical in the extreme did not matter. And even though she was presently left to herself, as she had desired, it did not fade away. A mighty leaven was there and it worked.

She had somewhat relieved her emotions after receiving the decree by a mad gallop through the hills to the isolated mountain cabin, half-lodge, half-camp, where after that brief experience of the colony society she had elected to pass the time. Not until she set foot on the broad porch of the rude log bungalow confronting the mighty sweep of the great Sierra Nevada range, its peaks glistening with the glory of the everlasting snow, did she draw it from the pocket. Under the influence of an irresistible impulse, after one hasty glance at it, she threw it from her as if it had been a reptile and with a movement peculiarly feminine she actually stamped her heel upon it.

It represented a great deal, this inoffensive paper that she had trampled under foot. It wiped out, so far as such things could be obliterated, the bitter and harrowing experiences of the past year. It restored to her that maiden name which, through the forbearance of her husband, she might still use without too great an antagonism between name and fact. It permitted her to marry the man to whom she had deliberately elected to give herself. It shut the door of the past behind her and opened the door of the future before her.

She discovered then, in that hour, at that mo-

ment, what she had indeed more than suspected before but what she had steadfastly refused to admit even to herself, that she did not want to pass through the door that opened into the future but that she would much rather go back through the portal of the past. Too late she realized that it was not Richard Neyland she loved but John Warburton!

That it was too late she never attempted to dispute. Indeed that consciousness had kept her from backing out at the last moment, from leaving Reno before the final judgment. There was a natural pride that moved her to stick it out to the end. She had repudiated her husband. She had declined to be his wife. She had thrown herself into the arms of Neyland; to be sure those arms had been eagerly extended to her, wide open to her, but that did not materially alter the fact. And there could be no doubt as to the genuineness of Neyland's passion for her. It was as great an emotion as he could exhibit or entertain.

For that matter there was no doubt of Warburton's feeling for her, or at least there had been no doubt before. Now he might have changed. She went over again the episodes in her singular intercourse with these two men. She could not think of one without thinking of the other, by the way. In that camp in the hills where she had been left completely alone by a justly affronted colony, a new perspective of values had been established. She saw the two men in their right relations to each

other. Of necessity she considered them together and drew comparisons.

She had recovered her strength and health and her beauty in that cabin in the pine-clad uplands, facing the mighty rampart of the main range whose snow-topped, up-flung peaks were inspiration to the lonely watcher. She had been alone with Nature, that is alone with God, and He had spoken to her in the solitudes. She could not doubt it.

Now the heart of any human being is a complex thing and the mainsprings of action are not easily separable one from another. How much the fact that she had awakened to the realization that after all she did not love Neyland, seeing him at last as he was; or the additional fact that she had begun to realize that she did love Warburton, seeing him at last as he was; or yet the other fact that, often and often, lying with her hands clasped under her head upon the carpet of pine needles, looking up through the waving branches at the blue sky, she had considered the warnings and appeals of the Church as set forth by Father Smith, had moved her, who can say? At all events they all worked together to one end.

She had few correspondents. Rose Tayloe was the only one worthy of the name. Her letters she read with avidity and answered at length. Becky Alton had written once, twice, thrice, but in default of any answer had finally ceased to trouble her. She had heard a few times from Colonel Tayloe on matters of business. Her fortune had

been put in her own control. It was that which enabled her to indulge her fancy in purchasing this mountain cabin, which she had furnished in accordance with her taste and comfort. She lived alone there with her devoted maid and such servants as were necessary to her quiet domestic arrangements. She grew to love the place and she had thought she would keep it forever, but on that morning as she ground that decree of divorce under her heel it suddenly became filled with associations hateful instead of sweet and she resolved to dispose of it immediately.

She sat down presently, resting her chin in her hand, and stared down at the beautiful, tree-clad little city, nestling beneath the protection of the range and looking like a handful of pearls in a goblet of emerald, she had often said, recalling some fantastic Arab simile of her lighter reading. The thought of a city with its busy, bustling, enterprising merchants and its crowds of people always brought Warburton to her mind. She knew now when she had begun to love him. It was on that night in which he had mastered Neyland and would have hurled him over the cliff to destruction but for her staying hand. How mighty and how masterful he had been to the man he hated, how contemptuous of the woman he loved—had loved—loved! Which?

If he had not suggested the divorce she admitted that she never would have sought it. He might have had her then if he had taken her, if he had

only been mighty and masterful to the woman as well as to the man. She fancied herself in his strong arms, her little body high uplifted, and her very soul thrilled to the idea. Why had she been such a fool? Seeking to avoid the Scylla of the obligations of an unloving marriage she had been about to fall into the Charybdis of exactly the same situation; for until that hour she had been firmly resolved to go through with the program, to marry Neyland just as soon as it became legally possible. She had suspected in her early sojourn at Reno the true state of her feelings but she had gone on because no other course seemed possible. She had gone on in a perfect frenzy of desperate determination. But it is one thing to maintain such a state of mind and being during the approach, it is quite another thing to confront the consummation when it is at hand.

There was nothing new or strange or unexpected that Neyland had done that had opened her eyes. He was just as he had been. In fact, he had been in a much better and more admirable frame of mind and condition of body and spirit than ever before. For the first three months of their separation he had been lost to her in the wilds of Labrador. He had come back from his battle with nature in the wilderness with the renewed strength he needed for the harder battle with civilization in New York. But these three months had been fatal to him in ways of which he did not dream. Three months without the exchange of a word had wrought his undoing so far as her love was concerned.

She had not given up her hope of happiness with Neyland without a struggle. Since his return to New York he had written her every day; passionate, intense, pleading, devoted letters to which she honestly endeavoured to reply in kind. She strove to simulate a virtue—if so it might be called—she did not possess; she tried to exhibit an emotion she did not feel. At first he had reproached her for her coldness—being keen to detect it despite her efforts at concealment—but latterly he had come to realize the impotency as well as the impolicy of such a course.

He had all the confidence of a great passion in his ability eventually to compel a return. Even though her letters were colder than he fancied, even though she did not meet his craving and her love was even to his blinded soul less than his own, he trusted and hoped. As ever trust and hope were parents to belief. When the divorce was granted and they were married all would be well, he fatuously told himself. She could not long resist the compulsion of his unbounded devotion, he was sure.

That she could by any possibility have been mistaken in her own feeling, that she could have grown to love her husband never entered his head. She would not allow herself to think that, but the very effort she made to put that growing and deepening conviction out of her soul but entrenched it there the more firmly. It needed but a precipitant to make the fact stand out nakedly before

her and the precipitant was, of course, the decree of divorce. Her whole soul cried out for John Warburton. Her honour, her pride, her plighted word, threw her into the arms of Richard Neyland.

CHAPTER XXVIII

TO MAKE OR BREAK

NEYLAND had not been idle in New York. A great undertaking had been conceived by him with the assistance of Mr. Billy Alton, who, to do him justice, had shown himself a better friend than ever before in that he had ceased to put temptation in Neyland's way, and indeed in the excitement of a different method of having a good time had put it out of his own way, somewhat to the annoyance of his wife, who found him on occasion strangely prosaic.

Alton and Neyland had joined forces, organizing a pool for the sole purpose of crushing Warburton. The audacity of the proposition, its difficulty, and its magnitude did not daunt the two young adventurers. Given a good hatred back of him, man will try anything. Neyland's hatred of Warburton was in a large measure shared by his friend. For various reasons Alton found the great financier, who had treated him with cutting indifference, not to say contempt, on occasion, an object most agreeable to his pride to attack. A man whose operations were as vast and varied as Warburton's

was always open to assault. In the course of those operations there was always a point that was vulnerable. Many men had attacked Warburton, singly or in combination with others, but he had always won out. There was no single man who could successfully oppose him. But could he fight such a group as Neyland and Alton sought to enlist to get control of the great Inter-Oceanic Railroad at their own price.

Neyland and Alton alone would have no chance whatsoever. They were shrewd enough to realize this. Their plan was to organize from an opposition which was always ready to attack success or to oppose mastery such a powerful combination as even Warburton could not stand against. In this case they could certainly count on the competing transcontinental lines, which had sought to wreck the Inter-Oceanic before Warburton got hold of it.

Neyland was an impetuous man, quick and bold in action; Alton, cooler, quieter, and not less brave, was an excellent foil. The combination was ideal. It was Alton who restrained Neyland from premature action. The two young men, who had the entrée socially or in business everywhere and who were both members of the stock exchange, working quietly, cautiously, and with the deepest secrecy with the heads of the three great rivals of the Inter-Oceanic Railroad for their chief advisers and backers, accumulated their resources and aided by some of the biggest financiers made every pre-

paration before striking, without permitting the least inkling of their intention to get abroad.

Two weeks before the date set for the hearing of the case and the granting of the divorce, having completed their organization, they hurled an attack upon Warburton's stocks and properties which for power and skill and determination Warburton had never sustained and the street had never seen equalled.

Their scheme, like every great plan of attack, was simplicity itself in its essence although there were, of course, complexities in the working out of details. They proposed to sell short the stock of the Inter-Oceanic until they had hammered it down to such a point that they could take over the road. The "I-O," as it was commonly known, was the apple of Warburton's eye. His genius had always been constructive rather than destructive. He had taken the road when it was about to go into bankruptcy. He had bought and now held something like forty per cent. of the stock. The balance of the stock was in the "Street" and with small investors and from both sources he had acquired enough proxies to control the road.

The road had almost been ruined by the crushing opposition of the other great transcontinental trunk lines which it paralleled. It had paid no dividends for years. It had not yet paid anything under Warburton's management for that matter, for everything the road had made—and it was now on a paying basis—had been used to rehabilitate

the properties. This had been done so skilfully that public buying of the stock had been liberal. Warburton's ability and methods had won him many stockholders. The trust they reposed in his integrity and judgment had been the greatest compliment ever paid him.

Warburton had put his own money freely into the road. The great Warburton Trust Company with its allied and subsidiary companies already held much of Warburton's stock in other enterprises, which he had hypothecated to get ready cash to put into the I-O. Colonel Tayloe would have done anything on earth for his friend except violate the law as President and controlling genius of the Warburton Trust Company. In spite of the fact that Warburton was the largest stockholder in the Trust Company and its branches he could get no accommodation from it except in compliance with the provisions of the law; nor, to do him justice, did Warburton desire anything more than that. There was a peculiar, rigid, almost romantic sense of honour about this great business man.

Misfortunes never come singly. An unavoidable and disastrous wreck of the "Transcontinental Limited" about two weeks before the granting of his wife's divorce in which a number of passengers had been killed; and another accident in which a train containing an immensely valuable shipment of raw silk from the Pacific coast had run into a way freight, had aroused the public greatly.

Before Warburton took over the road wrecks had been common and of course every newspaper harked back to the past, illogically and unkindly but inevitably. The monetary loss was tremendous. The financial responsibility for the killed and injured passengers and for the burnt-up train-load of raw silk ran into the millions. The day after the wreck Warburton was surprised at the large blocks of I-O stock which were being offered for sale on the exchange. He realized that this was short stock and met the attack promptly.

Neyland and Alton, both being members of the stock exchange, carried on their operations openly. Although they were both men of fortune neither of them was of enough importance or of sufficient wealth to try to get control of the I-O. Warburton realized that so soon as his brokers brought him the information. It did not appear, however, who was back of the attack. At any rate, the offering of the stock of the railroad for sale together with the disparaging comments upon the disastrous wreck brought about a sharp decline in the price.

Warburton's resources were still ample and by steady buying he forced it up again. But the attack was repeated the day after and the day after, and as there is a sort of wild contagion about such attacks people who would normally have had nothing to do with it joined in the raid. The speculative spirit rose, and the market became feverish and excited. Many *bona fide* owners got

frightened and offered their small holdings on the declining market, which added to the depression. The price of the stock, in spite of all Warburton's efforts to support it, continued to fall. That would not have mattered very much—the real value of the road was not impaired by speculation in its stock—had it not been for the fact that Warburton had already pledged his stock, with other securities, to the bank for loans to carry on the work of rehabilitation.

Just as soon as the price fell Colonel Tayloe had to call for more collateral to keep up the proper ratio between the security and the loan. Warburton by this time realized the serious quality of the persistent attack. He realized it more keenly when in certain papers controlled by men in opposition to him subtle innuendoes about the soundness of the Warburton Trust Company and its allied companies began to appear. The battle was still openly conducted by Alton and Neyland but everybody knew that vast forces must be back of those two knights-errant of the stock exchange, and Warburton soon woke up to the fact that he had the fight of his life on his hands.

He could not discover the source of the power the young men possessed but he guessed that it could be no other than the competing transcontinental roads. To fight them all he strained every nerve to the breaking point. Colonel Tayloe put his own private fortune at Warburton's disposal and when there was an actual run on the Trust Company it

was that fortune hastily converted into gold that finally checked it.

The battle resolved itself, as such conflicts usually do, into a matching of purses. Not even Warburton alone, great as were his resources and high as was his credit, could hope to win out against such a combination as he and the world, which watched the battle as eagerly as the old Romans watched the life and death struggles in the arena, realized must be back of the attack. He must have assistance. Trusted agents were hurriedly dispatched to get in touch with strong men and enlist their co-operation.

Help came to him, however, from an unexpected source. Into his office one day an odd, quaint, curious figure of a man forced himself. He had no card to give to the clerks outside. He refused to impart his name. He would not discuss his business. He simply insisted on seeing Warburton. His persistence at last got him past the guards that hedge about the great American business man.

Warburton, haggard, worn but outwardly calm, imperturbable in bearing, greeted him briefly.

"Your name?" he said sharply.

"Huntley, Jonathan Huntley," returned the curious old man whose face and speech and clothes and bearing indicated rusticity, but in whom Warburton, accustomed to read men, detected a certain shrewdness and keenness. "Not that it means anything to you," the newcomer added.

"Your business?"

"Farmer."

"I mean your business with me."

"Well, from what I can larn you're up agin it pretty hard an' it struck me that I could he'p you."

Warburton was wise enough not to disdain possible help from any source.

"Your will to do so pleases me. Is your power equal to your purpose?"

"I guess 'tis," said the old man. "As I figgered it out somebody is tryin' to put you out of the I-O."

As everybody now knew that Warburton, ordinarily uncommunicative, nodded.

"Right."

"Nobody's got any special interest in beatin' you out of that railroad 'ceptin' the compeetin' railroads."

"I have no evidence to that fact but I have no doubt it's true."

"That's the way it 'peared to me. Somebody might have a private grudge agin you in the beginnin' but it's too big for that now."

"Right again," assented the other, now deeply interested.

"I gener'ly aims to keep in tech with what's goin' on an' I know there ain't nobody that cares a whoop in Halifax for the I-O 'ceptin' you an' the friends you have made for it."

"The friends I have made have joined hands

with the opposition," said Warburton grimly, "and hundreds of people who owned little blocks of stock, which when I bought it were worth nothing and which before this attack I had brought legitimately up to between sixty and seventy, have sold their stock and added to the panic."

"How are you comin' out with it?"

Warburton looked at the old man closely.

"You might be an emissary, a spy. You might belong to the other side."

"Look me over agin," said the other. "Look me over keerful. I calk'late you ain't got where you are without bein' some jedge o' men. Do I look like that kind of a man?"

Warburton stared at his old visitor.

"You don't," he said. "After all, why shouldn't I trust you. Everybody knows I'm up against it hard. I'm not beaten yet but I can't keep the fight up much longer. Every resource I've got on earth has been pledged. I've bought and bought and bought, loaned my stock, received it back again, loaned it again and again, and the price still goes down."

"And if you don't git no he'p you're goin' to smash, an' the railroad——"

"The railroad is all right, but if I fail they can buy in the stock and then run the road to suit themselves."

"Them compeetin' lines'll be in power agin! Well, your road runs right through my town,"—he mentioned the name of the seat of one of the

thriftiest and most fertile counties on the line—
“The people o’ that county kind-a looks up to me. I own a bank there an’ I’ve got several good farms, a little grist mill, an’ a gener’l store.”

“I see.”

“On my advice when this I-O road was projected they all bought stock in it. The compeetin’ roads treated us vilely. They bled us to death on their freight rates an’ their gener’l conduct has left a kind-a feelin’ of bitter hatred agin ’em in our town. We thought we seen a way to beat ’em when the I-O come through but them fellers jest about wrecked it. I knowed it was good property an’ I persuaded my friends an’ neighbours to hold on. Then you took it an’ things begun to look brighter. We’ve been a-watchin’ you build up the road. Then this came on an’ some of ’em got scared agin but I persuaded ’em to hold on a second time. Now I calk’late that between us we control about fifty thousand shares of stock.”

Warburton’s eyes flashed. That fifty thousand shares of stock might make or break him.

“You see, of course,” said the old farmer, who had been shrewdly watching his face. “Well t’other side sees too. A young feller named Alton has telegraphed us a proposition for our stock.”

“What did you say?”

“I told him I’d take it under advisement an’ come down to New York an’ let him know today.”

“Good. What do you propose to do?”

"Some men might auction it off between the two of ye to git the best price for it."

"Some men might."

"But I ain't that kind."

"No."

"Sure not. We likes the way you took hold of the road an' what you done for it an' I believe its future is safer in your hands than anybody's, so I come down here to ask you what I could do to he'p you out with that stock. The game is a leetle too big for me but I calk'late you know how to play it."

"I do."

"Jest suppose that stock was your own, what'd you do?"

"This," answered Warburton. "Meet them as you agreed. Give them an option to borrow the stock, ask them a million for it. Make them give you a certified check for that amount. Tell them that you haven't got it with you, that it's distributed among your friends and neighbours but that you can go and get it together."

"They wouldn't believe me."

"Probably not. Give them a certified check for two million to be forfeited in case you don't deliver the stock say one week from today."

"An' what'd they do with the stock if they got it?"

"Deliver it to me at the last minute and if I could not pay for it on sight, they'd get me."

"I see! It sounds mighty simple."

"All great business deals are simple."

"There's only one thing agin it."

"What's that?"

"I'm pretty well fixed but I ain't got no two million."

"I have. It's almost the last that I have," said Warburton. "You know that both checks will be deposited in escrow. That is put in care of some bank. You can't cash their option check until you deliver the stock, they can't cash your forfeit check unless you fail to deliver."

"I see."

"When the time comes you don't deliver."

"An' lose your two million?"

"Exactly. They will offer you any price for that stock. They will offer to give you back your two million and as much more and as much more perhaps than that. They've got to have it or lose."

"They can offer an' be jiggered," said the old man grimly. "If you win the stock'll be worth——"

"Whatever we want to make it," said Warburton. "I'll buy it at your own price if you wish to sell it after the battle is over, and you know in whose hands the road and its patrons will fare best."

"I do an' if you win I calk'late to hold on to it."

The matter being so important, Warburton went to the Trust Company himself where the necessary transactions were carried out and farmer Huntley

and his certified check went to meet the conspirators. A young man from Warburton's office who was unknown to Alton and Neyland went with him to pilot him through the intricacies and technicalities of the deal the main principles of which he possessed thoroughly.

Warburton still had a last group of gilt-edge securities but when that was expended he was at the end of his resources even to a heavy mortgage on his house and real-estate holdings. His friends had helped him but the general public had got the speculative fever and short selling on the exchange was tremendous. The crisis could not long be postponed. Wall Street was on the verge of panic. Holders of all kinds of stocks were selling out, loans were refused on usually acceptable collateral forcing fresh sales, and every hour saw lower and lower prices all through the list.

Some of the fear of Warburton's hitherto invincible name got into some of the members of the combination. He was so cool, so calm, and imperturbable. He was so confident and shrewd in every utterance he made that they themselves had begun to feel as worried and as apprehensive as they had hoped to make him feel. Yet on the whole their position seemed to be better than Warburton's and the general public, even the keenest observers among them, expected that in the final show-down Warburton would be broken. He would lose the road and everything else that he had, which he had used to protect it.

Warburton had gradually acquired a large majority of the I-O stock and in addition thereto had contracts for the delivery of many thousand shares—the short stock sold by the pool which did not exist in fact! When he should demand delivery the conspirators must find the stock. The only source of large supply was Warburton himself and the Huntley fifty thousand shares. At the final settlement whatever price Warburton fixed would have to be paid, provided he won and controlled.

Could he stand the strain until the day of reckoning? Would Huntley prove to be true blue? If he failed him and the conspirators got hold of that fifty thousand shares which would have to be paid for— No! No! Huntley could be depended upon.

Until the last the conspirators had kept back one resource—Chrissey Warburton's fortune. Almost as hard put to it as Warburton to raise money Neyland had, nevertheless, clung eagerly to that as the last shot in the locker so to speak. Neyland had sworn that he would not use it until the last moment nor would he use it until its use would clinch the deal and make assurance double sure. That moment had come the day before the divorce had been granted and it had gone into the pool. It did not seem possible that the opposition could lose. Their option on the Huntley stock with its tremendous forfeit made them certain that at the last moment they could offer

it to Warburton and he could not take it. The size of that forfeit reassured them. Warburton's reason for posting such an enormous forfeit was justified. If Huntley were true all would be well. Every undertaking in the world depends in its last analysis upon the fidelity of some man or woman.

In the excitement of these last two weeks Chrissey Warburton had fully shared since on her lover's representations she had put her whole fortune at his absolute disposal for the deal. Strangely enough she wanted Warburton beaten. She wanted him brought down to poverty. She would not admit it if any one else had said so but if she were the possessor of the fortune and he were poor she might— But what was the use of thinking that since she was going to be Neyland's wife?

Well, if Warburton were beaten, as every paper in New York stated he would be after the battle became a public affair, he would be ruined and she with all the others in the combination would make millions. She had a distinct purpose in her mind to give back to Warburton what she made in order that he might start again. Thus her action in transferring the control of her securities to Neyland meant one thing to Neyland and another to herself.

CHAPTER XXIX

SWEPT AWAY

Now the growing strain of this battle had become terrific. Neyland had to sustain with it another battle, an inward strife, which through each succeeding day also grew more terrible, and to which each hour found him more unequal. He had sworn a high oath to such gods as he believed in that he would not give way to the temptation which had so often brought him low. His friends had laughed at his strange but steady refusal even to taste what was so freely poured out before him. He had gone back into society, naturally into its fastest and most extravagant set to which he belonged, but everywhere and at all times he had refused to break his rule to touch nothing. He gave no reason and no one knew it was for her sake.

Neyland had no special religious bent. Like many another man he scarcely knew what he believed. Certainly he never formulated his creed. But as well as he could he tried to strengthen his courage by whatever voiceless prayer he could make to whatever Power there might be above him. The pressure on him was tremendous.

Presently something of it appeared in his letters where Chrissey Warburton detected it instantly. She had encouraged him and appealed to him and stimulated him in the double battle. If she had loved him her efforts would have been more effective, but since she did not there was always back of what she said an expression which he rightly enough considered cruel, a determination that if he failed she would have none of him.

Singularly enough she sometimes awoke to a horrified realization that she almost wished he would fail so as to give her an excuse for breaking it off. The excitement of the battle, the nervous tension of the mighty financial conflict, and the inward fight against temptation told on him. The habits of a lifetime are hard to unlearn. Three months in New York had gone far to undo three months in Labrador.

Neyland found himself praying that it might soon be over. If the double strain kept up much longer he would be unequal to it. Sometimes he cursed the day on which he had been born and the memory of his father and his mother, who had given him no heritage with which to fight. He grew weaker and just when he needed most the passionate devotion of a woman, in spite of his hopefulness he found it the more and more lacking in her letters. His terror lest he might fall, which grew more and more pronounced in his own letters, awoke her pity but also moved her contempt.

And yet she saw just deep enough into the soul

of Neyland to realize the greatness of the struggle he was making for her. She had to admit that she was not helping him as he had a right to expect. And it was that consciousness that determined her, if he did not give way, to go through with the plan to the marital end.

Certainly he would deserve the reward if he succeeded in keeping the faith. Given his ancestry, his habit of life, his custom of indulgence, that he had so far triumphed was marvellous. Save for his own letters she was left without other means of knowing what was toward, for Rose Tayloe had long since married the Duke and they had gone back to Italy. And naturally not even so dependent a man as Neyland could bring himself to tell her all. There were deeps in his soul, scenes of conflict, temptations, which he could not reveal to her. But for her sake he would keep on trying. The letters showed her what desperate straits he had been through.

One of the things to which Chrissey eagerly looked forward was seeing Rose Tayloe again, for the new Duchessa di Attavanti expected to return to America with her husband early in the summer. A letter received that very day had been mailed just before her departure from Italy. In Chrissey de Selden's pocket with the decree of divorce there was also the daily letter from Neyland. She had not cared enough to read it before. It was like the others, only more pitiful. He was weaker. His resisting power was less. He did not know whether

he could stand the strain. The temptation was horrible. The situation was the more awful because he said Warburton was a ruined man absolutely. He had practically won the material battle. Could he win the spiritual one? He could not tell.

The next four days would determine both questions. The success of the combination was settled beyond peradventure now, so he declared. Warburton was beaten beyond recovery. The opposition had learned that every resource at his command had been employed, that his credit had been strained to the breaking point, and that nothing availed. Richard Neyland had done it. There was triumph in that announcement, clear and undisguised. He had avenged all the insults Warburton had heaped on him and all the misery that Warburton had caused her, so he wrote.

It was for her sake that he had done it. Yet he repeated that such was his own condition that he hardly knew whether he could survive the strain. He was like a runner who leads the field, who sees the goal before him, who knows that if he can maintain the pace a little longer he will win the race, but who hears the panting breath of the pursuing enemy at his shoulder! She read again the last pages of the letter:

I am determined to succeed, for if I fail I lose you. I have come to see things differently since you have loved me. If I can't be worthy of you I won't claim

you. You don't know what temptation is. You can have no idea how it confronts me. I have scarcely slept. I haven't eaten. I'm living on your love alone. And, oh forgive me, I cannot bear to say it, but it doesn't seem to me that you have given me that support I have a right to ask from a heart that truly loves, that I expected from you, dearest. That is what makes it so hard. With love all things are possible. Without it—well you know what life is without it!

I'm a little mad tonight I think, dear heart. Do you love me after all and can you love me to the end? Can any one love a man so weak as I? I ought not to tell you, it isn't good policy. I should dwell upon the triumph that awaits me, the happiness to which I look forward, but I can have no secrets from you. My heart is breaking because my will is breaking. If you would save me, write me, telegraph me, and at the first moment come to me.

The great God, if such there be, alone knows how I have struggled. I have said it was for my manhood but it was for you. I am on the brink of failure, a failure the more terrible because it is a mental, a spiritual failure that goes side by side with the material success. Help me! Save me! You alone can do it, if you even care. By what can I appeal to you? Yet as I live it is your happiness of which I think rather than my own. I said once I would accept any fate in any future to insure that and that is true.

The lawyers assure me that there will be no possibility of your failing to receive the divorce. Perhaps when you get this letter it will already have been granted to you. If you love me telegraph me instantly.

I cannot come to you now as I should have. I must stay to see the end of Warburton. But the minute that battle is over I shall be yours. And yet, oh woman that I love, standing so far above me, my passion for you has shown me that unless you can return my love in some measure I won't condemn you for casting me off. If you do not love me, even though I have you as my wife, I could never conquer myself, and life with me would be hell for you—yes, and for me.

I love you, I love you, I love you. If I can only stand up these next few days——

The letter broke off abruptly. It accurately represented the man—independence and dependence, strength and weakness, power and helplessness. The words burned themselves in her soul. What was she, a Frankenstein? Had she no soul that even this could not arouse her, could not waken her heart?

Now she knew very well what love was. She loved Warburton. It was his picture not Neyland's that rose before her eyes. She saw him suddenly against the wall, wrecked, ruined, humiliated, changed. Neyland had written her before that it was her fortune which he had thrown into the effort at the last minute that had completed Warburton's undoing. She loved him, not Neyland. Sometimes love is the cruelest thing on earth. It was cruel to Neyland now.

She gathered up the papers, thrust them into the pocket of her jacket, and went out into the woods.

Far from observation, away from the haunts of men, in a secret place in the hills she loved she flung herself down on her face and clenched her hands. Her cheek touched that bracelet she had worn. With raised head she looked at it a long time. Finally she sat up and drew it from her arm. It spoke no message her heart craved now. Hard by a brook flowed down from the mountain crest into the dashing green torrent of the Truckee River in the valley. The melting snows in the summer heats had filled the brook brimful. She stared at the bracelet in her hand for a long time. She made her decision with reluctance, with hesitation, but with finality.

She could not marry Neyland. What had he said? His own words had given her the reason. She could not disguise from him if she were with him the fact that she did not love him. She knew what a hell a loveless marriage made. In that hell he would be weaker than ever. After all it was not so much his love for her that kept him up as hers for him. And she did not love him. It was better that he should know it now than later. If he fell now he would only anticipate what would inevitably happen later and again and again. It was cruel but merciful. So she argued—speciously or otherwise?

The circlet of silver with its strange settings lay dull in her hand, its message unspoken. "A-E-I!" For eternity? Never! Suddenly she rose to her feet. She threw the bracelet from her into the

torrent roaring down the mountain. A little splash and it was gone.

She was relieved but not happy. It seemed to her that she had no heart, no soul. She called aloud upon God as she had done before in the solitudes of the wooded hills but He answered not, neither in the wind that stirred the pines, nor in the roar of the stream as it tumbled over the rocks on the mountain side.

Was she doing right? The Church did not sanction the marriage of divorced people. Was she influenced by that? And if so to what extent? Or was it only that she loved one man and not the other? If she had loved Neyland, what then? Would God, the Church, the Priest—she could not tell. Had she any right to expect that God would hear her? Was love always cruel to someone? She had been cruel to Warburton. If he still loved her—and the doubt gave her a great heart pang—he would be suffering as she suffered now.

She had sought happiness, fondly fancying she might get it in freedom from Warburton and in union with Neyland, but it was not to be. There was not to be any joy in life for her anywhere that she could see. Stop! Failing love, she might get happiness from service. She would go back to New York. She would make over to Warburton her share of the winnings of the great combination. She would force him to accept it. He should not know whence it came. She dreamily imagined she could comprise that impossible task.

And then she would go to Bermuda. She would seek out Father Smith. She would ask him to show her how to work and serve. Perhaps in that way she could atone. She could make amends. As for Neyland he must go his own way. Selfish, cruel, disloyal though her course might be, she could no other.

She went back to the house after spending the whole day in the woods alone. Before she ate or slept she wrote a letter to Neyland. She told him that she had been mistaken, that she realized even better than he what a loveless marriage would be, that while she had been willing to enter upon it, yet if she did she would damn him more utterly, because he would see it, than if she broke it off then by telling him the truth. She sent a man down to the station on horseback to mail her letter on the night express.

The last argument she had used to him appealed to her. While her letter might hurl Neyland into the depths again, whatever effect it produced would not be ultimately as bad as the realization that she did not love him even though she married him. And then she experienced a wave of pity for him which was more akin to contempt than she would have acknowledged. For the moment she seemed to herself a monster of selfishness. She wished that she could die and yet in the relief of her decision she found a source of strength which had never come to her before.

Whatever the motive, love of Warburton, pity of

Neyland, the slings and arrows of an outraged conscience, the teachings of religion, she was going to follow the right course at last. How pitiful is it that the right course for the individual frequently brings sorrow and shame to others! Chrissey de Selden, as she was now, had broken Warburton's heart. She would break Neyland's. And her own? Had she a heart? Who was she that this malign power had been given to her? What was this love that swayed her back and forth and in whose name, like that of liberty, had been committed so many crimes?

Moved by a sudden impulse the day after she dispatched her letter she took the train for New York.

CHAPTER XXX

RECEIVING THE NEWS

So important a social event as the divorce of the wife of the great John Warburton could not take place without comment. The next morning it was spread broadcast by the Associated Press and it aroused the more interest because of the desperate straits to which her husband had been reduced by the great combination. Neyland saw it. Warburton saw it. These two were looking for it. There was nothing Warburton could do. It added a grimmer touch to his already grim face. It intensified the eternal anguish which he had borne within his bosom, concealed as the wolf that gnawed the vitals of the Spartan, which had never left him since that day at Bermuda.

"John," said Colonel Tayloe at breakfast—they had been living together ever since Rose's marriage—"I suppose you saw the papers this morning."

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Don't speak of it please."

"I must. I've just learned that the funds for

that last attack, the source of which you could not fathom, came from her."

"No, not that. It isn't possible."

"Yes. Not knowing of the transfer from me some brokers consulted me about some interests of hers, and with that as a clue I learned that she had made it all over to——"

"Not to him?"

"Yes."

"Good God!"

"Your wife——"

"Not since this morning."

"Her fortune will go with the rest."

"Yes. She and her lover will both be ruined."

"Warburton," began the Colonel after a pause, "you're too big a man——"

"I hope so," he answered, divining the older man's thought; "I'll depend on you. We'll get the man she—Neyland—to fix it up in some way. Perhaps she can be persuaded that her fortune had been transferred to you and not used after all."

"Of course. That is just what I wanted to bring out, John."

"She is going to be unhappy enough with that drunken weakling," said Warburton passionately, "not to have to fight poverty as well. Oh, God," he burst out suddenly, completely losing his self-control, "how I care for that woman! I love her still. If I had only taken her when I had the power, if—but it's too late now. I'll leave you to attend to these details, Colonel. Just say how

much you will need and I'll draw you the check. The settlement must soon come. They can't keep it up much longer. You can fix it up afterward."

"Warburton," said the older man earnestly, "I never heard of such magnanimity. You gave her up, you let her get an uncontested divorce in order to marry another man, who has sought to crush you, and now you give her back her fortune. I don't understand it."

"Yes, you do," answered Warburton. "When a man like me loves a woman he loves her absolutely and for ever. It's her happiness, not mine that counts. I know how miserable she is going to be. There is nothing I can do to help her but this. Now, for God's sake don't mention it to me again. I can't stand it. This struggle with that combination has just about given me all I can sustain. Did you hear from Rose this morning?"

"I had a cablegram from the Azores relaying a wireless from the *Ancona*. She will be here in a few days."

"Bring them here. There's room enough for us all. I'll not be a wet blanket. You will be at the exchange or at the Trust Company every day until the issue is decided. I might need you at any time."

"I wouldn't miss it for the world," said the Colonel. "No battle I ever went through has equalled this. Let's talk the matter over again."

To the day of his death Warburton would remember with gratitude profound the good friend-

ship with which he had been blessed in Colonel Tayloe. If it had not been for his cheerful society, his pleasant humour, his serene optimism Warburton could scarcely have endured his position. Colonel Tayloe had cherished the hope that things would somehow right themselves in the end. He could not see how any woman could prefer Neyland to Warburton. And Warburton had clung to the hope too. That hope the announcement of the divorce had killed.

Another man was clinging to a hope that seemed to bid fair to be realized when first his eye caught sight of the flaming headline by which attention was called to the divorce. His heart leaped as he read it. For a moment he was eased of his torment. For a brief space his strength returned to him. Every moment he expected to hear from her.

But Neyland waited in vain for a telegram. He knew that his letter beseeching her to send him a wire must have reached her the day the divorce was granted. Already twenty-four hours had elapsed and no word had come. He threw prudence to the winds. He forgot in those hours of suspense and longing the supreme necessity of watching the battle on the stock exchange. He was consumed, obsessed by thoughts of her. He told Alton to look after things. At last, when he could stand it no longer he boldly sent her a wire:

“For God’s sake, if you love me telegraph me.”

Thereafter he waited until late in the night but received no reply. In his agitation it did not

occur to him to ascertain whether his wire had been delivered or not. As a matter of fact it did not reach Reno until she had gone. Her departure had been circumspect, not to say secret. The servants at the camp, who were to pack up and follow, had been given strict orders to say nothing. They refused to accept the telegram. It did not seem to be of moment and it was not relayed to her train. She knew nothing of it.

The strain of her silence was the last straw to poor Neyland. He could fight no longer. Once more and after six months he fell. Let no man who has not grappled with such an appetite condemn him for the fall or wonder at the greatness and the swiftness of his descent.

BOOK VI
THE FAILURE

CHAPTER XXXI

THE WOMAN OF THE STREET

THE small room in which Neyland found himself was strange to him. He had never been in it before. He had no realization how he came to be in it then. It was indescribably mean and poor in all its appointments. It was not even clean. There was in evidence, however, a sort of make-believe, shabby finery of incredible vulgarity that would have filled him with disgust if he had taken time to consider.

From where he lay in sickening disorder of mind, body and clothes upon a frightful bed he could see the dirty window-panes behind cheap lace curtains languidly wavering in the hot, sickly wind that came up from the reeking street through the half-opened sash. Mingled with the odour of cheap perfume, the unsavoury smell of bad cooking, were a thousand other stews of poverty and shame.

He turned his head away from the window and his feverish glance fell upon a frowzy, dishevelled, half-dressed woman. She was thin of person, haggard of face, repulsive in appearance in spite of inartistic dabs of colour on her sunken cheeks.

A bit of rumpled scarlet ribbon twisted in the imitation lace of a cheap negligee only served to accentuate the soiled white of her undergarments. She was as unfamiliar to him as the room. She fitted the room perfectly. Neither fitted Neyland.

How long he had been there he did not know. Apparently from the hot sunlight streaming through the narrow window it was afternoon. His awakening had been without sound. He had scarcely stirred on the bed. He had attracted no attention. She was not looking at him. She was busy cooking some unappetizing mess on a little stove attached to a gas jet by a rubber tube. The smell of the food was horribly nauseating. There were several empty bottles on a table. The odour, rank and hateful, of cheap, vile whiskey came to his sickened senses as he looked upon them.

Her deadly profession had left its inevitable marks upon her. Want, neglect, hunger, thirst, bodily desecration, all had signed her, the last worse than all the others. Dissipation—physical, mental, and spiritual—had wrecked her. She had gone down, down, down, her last place of business the street, her last resort this wretched room. Drink, debauchery, and disease claimed her for their own. Her final haven would be six feet of earth in the Potter's field. And that soon.

Neyland looked at her uncomprehendingly at first, but as he gradually realized what his presence there meant, what had been the end of that failure

of—was it the night before?—his heart was filled with loathing for her, shame and contempt for himself—such self-scorn as for the moment made him oblivious to the desperate, physical cravings and agonies of his body. Another man—perhaps even he—under other circumstances would have felt pity for this wretched child of humanity, scarcely yet a woman, this poor bit of human flotsam about to be cast ashore and buried in the sands that border the sea of oblivion—merciful fate did she but know it!

But Neyland had no room for these thoughts now. To him she was not a woman even. She was just the sign by which he recognized his degradation and shame. It was not the first time he had awakened in that way under similar circumstances, but he had never sunk so low before. He had never so thoroughly and completely plumbed the deeps of shame. He had a dim recollection that after the first taste of the night before, or was it two or three nights, or longer before, he could not tell, he had gone mad. He remembered how he had struggled at first, how he had said he would stop and then he found he could not. He recalled leaving his apartment. He remembered a long drive in a taxicab through brightly lighted streets to darker quarters. He recollected dismissing the car and wandering on and on afoot. He remembered drinking again and again at every door open to him and then—nothing more until this awful awakening.

Chrissey de Selden! It was a profanation to think upon her in such a place under such circumstances, but he could not control his thoughts any more than he could control his will, his nerves, his body. They were both women,—she and this wretched sister.

Curiously enough Neyland recalled at this juncture a certain day at Naples on his first visit there when he had been ushered into the secret rooms of the great museum by a leering guide, smiling with base suggestiveness upon him. He recollected how he had presently come forth therefrom sick at heart at the frank, unblushing horrors of ancient Pompeii. Thereafter he had wandered through the rooms unable to shut out what he had seen until he had come into the great apartment in which hung the wondrous Pietà of Annibale Carracci—in some moods and under some circumstances the most beautiful picture in the world. He vividly recalled the relief with which he had looked at it. Yet these Daughters of Pompeii and the Mater Dolorosa were alike women!—*Filles de joie* and Mother of God, alike women!

There had been comfort, consolation, joy, when he gazed upon the Pietà that day, but the thought of Chrissey de Selden this morning filled him with the greater horror because of the present woman. There was no comfort there. Yet they, too, were alike women, both made to love, to be loved, to be merry or sad.

The sickness in his heart was accompanied by

a hideous sickness of body. He strove against them both, scarcely conscious at first of the latter but more acutely realizing it as he struggled to a sitting position and sat with his head swimming, the room wavering about him, the woman's form rising and falling in a sort of strange fantastic dance. He put his hands to his head to steady himself, to his brow to cover his eyes and shut out what he saw.

His movements attracted the woman's attention. She looked up, reached her grimy hand at the end of a pitifully thin, scragged, naked arm, up to the gas jet and turned it out.

"You're awake, dearie, at last," she began in a voice that she strove to render seductive and beguiling in spite of the harshness of it—the voice of age from the throat of youth.

"How long have I been here?" he began, forcing speech, though every word tore his parched, constricted throat like a claw.

"I think it's three days or maybe four."

"Did I come here with you?"

"Of course. How else?"

"And have I been unconscious all the time?"

"Not all the time." She pointed to the bottles.

"We drank those together."

"And then?"

He could not say the words. The woman nodded.

"My God!" exclaimed the man.

"Have you got one?"

"One what?"

"A God?" asked the woman.

"No."

"It's just a figure of speech with you as with me, I guess. Well, the rest of your clothes are over yonder."

She pointed to a broken-backed divan in the corner of the room. What he was not wearing was strewn in confusion over it and intermingled as if to evidence his intimacy with her own tawdry finery—the soiled plumage of that night-bird.

"Here's your pocketbook," she said, opening the drawer of the table and handing the purse to him. "I paid for the whiskey and the food. But I didn't take anything except my just dues. I'm an honest woman."

She laughed shrilly, horribly as she proffered the book. Neyland waved it away and struggled to his feet.

"Better sit still," she said. "I'll mix you up a bracer. I know how you feel. Then you can get a bite to eat and beat it. Lord," she continued, "you were the drunkest man I ever saw able to keep his feet. I knew in a minute that my place wasn't for the likes of you and that I wasn't either. I took you in partly because of that," she went on. "I knew a man once that kind-a looked like you."

The man hid his face in his hands again as if vainly trying to hide his shame. The woman rose and came toward him after a few moments before

a broken-down dresser. She proffered him a concoction which she had made.

"Here, drink this."

"I want nothing," he said, waving it aside, "but to get away. God, that I could have fallen so low!"

"You couldn't fall much lower than I am, that's a fact," said the woman brazenly, "but you needn't put on any airs about it," she sneered.

Neyland staggered over to where his coat, vest, and shoes lay and put them on, although every movement was agony and his fingers would scarcely do the work.

"Let me help you, dearie," said the woman, coming closer to him.

He shook her off as if she had been a viper that had bitten him. His movement was rougher than he imagined. She fell back against the wall and some colour that rivalled the permanent paint suddenly came into her face.

"Don't touch me," exclaimed the man with an oath for which he was at once sorry.

"Touch you," answered the woman, her temper flaming, "oh, you fool, I've touched you already. You've got my brand on you for ever. Mankind and society have ground me down but I'm getting even."

Neyland shuddered, comprehending too well the purport of her envenomed words. He got into his clothes in some fashion. He turned to the door.

"You might at least say 'good-bye,'" said the

woman as his hand fumbled at the knob, "and you're forgetting your purse."

Neyland turned back, picked up his pocketbook, took from it a five-dollar bill, which he put in his vest pocket, and threw the purse back on the table.

"Keep it," he said.

"Do you think I want your dirty money?"

By this time he had got the door open. She picked the pocketbook up and threw it at him but her aim was indifferent. It struck the jamb and fell to the floor just as he closed the door behind him. The woman looked at it a moment. She staggered over to it, picked it up, counted the money over eagerly.

"Five hundred dollars!" she shrieked.

She sank down in the chair, threw her head back, and laughed. There was a little whiskey in the nearest bottle. She drank it down eagerly.

"What a find!" she cried. "What a fool!"

CHAPTER XXXII

HOME

So far as he could tell Neyland found that he was in the upper hall of what was obviously one of the meanest and most horrible tenements in New York. Although it was past noon, unkempt heads, male and female, peered out of open doors as he went stumbling down the dark, narrow, dirty stairs. If it had been earlier in the morning or later in the afternoon he might never have reached the street alive. He still had his watch, ring, and a diamond in his tie. For one thing he went at such headlong speed that no opportunity was given to stop him, and as no one was expecting any one to go out then no one was ready to offer him violence or to seek to detain him.

By great good fortune as he left the rookery he almost fell into the arms of a policeman on the street. It was a street on which he had never been and which he did not recognize. He knew he must be in the lower East Side.

"Officer," he said, clinging to the door-post, "I'm a sick man."

"You look it," laughed the policeman in amused contempt.

The officer recognized the ailment. He had seen similar cases, yet he gave more consideration to Neyland than usual, since he was so different from the habitués of that district.

"I want a taxicab or——"

"There aren't any taxis down here unless they bring people like you."

"Some conveyance then, anything to take me home," pleaded the man, too ill and desperate to resent the policeman's careless scorn.

"There's an excuse of a cab-stand around the corner, leastways once in a while there's a cab there. Here comes one now," said the officer, looking down the street into which a shabby hack had just turned. "Shall I hail it for you?"

"Please."

The wretched Neyland, more dead than alive, had to be helped into the cab. The officer and the driver alike opened their eyes when they heard the fashionable and exclusive upper Park Avenue address which Neyland gave to the driver as he sank down in a helpless huddle on the seat.

"Bad case," said the officer significantly to the cabman as the latter gathered up the reins and spoke to his horse.

It was a half-starved horse and a reeking, filthy cab. Progress through the crowded lower part of New York was slow at best. It seemed hours to the miserable man within before the cab

stopped at his door. He handed the man the five-dollar bill he had had the forethought to reserve and added all the loose silver in his pocket and then staggered painfully up the few steps and into the foyer hall.

Neyland had occupied these apartments for years. It was not the first time he had come home in that condition. He was a liberal spender, pleasant when sober, and popular with the servants of the house. The hall man caught him in his arms and with the assistance of the elevator boy got him to his apartment.

"Is there anything I can do for you, sir; get you anything?"

"Nothing," answered Neyland. "My man?"

"He was here a moment ago, sir. I'll——"

Just then the servant came from his quarters in the apartment.

"Mr. Neyland, sir——" he began.

"It's all right, Judson," said Neyland. "I've just come another cropper, you know, and——"

"Yes sir," said the man. "You can go," he said to the house servants, who were sure of a big tip later if they kept quiet. "I'll fix you up in no time, sir," he continued encouragingly.

The faithful valet had often received his master in bad condition. Experiences similar to this had been common enough in his long period of service in Neyland's employ, but that day there was something different in his master's bearing, which he could hardly define but which vaguely alarmed

him, and Neyland's next words increased his apprehension.

"I don't want anything now, Judson, but to be left alone," was the unusual answer. "Take the rest of the day off."

"But I can't leave you like this, Mr. Neyland," persisted the man, perplexed and now thoroughly alarmed.

"I tell you I don't want anybody about me. I've got to be alone. I want to think things over."

The servant, his face full of solicitude and concern, opened his mouth to remonstrate further but Neyland cut him short.

"Did you hear me?" he cried out with a sudden passion. "Go!"

"Very well, sir," returned the man.

There was nothing else he could do and it occurred to him that it might be dangerous to cross his master in his present mood.

"By the way," asked Neyland more quietly, "what day is it, Judson?"

"Friday afternoon, sir."

"And when was I here last?"

"You went out Tuesday night, sir; at least you weren't here when I came back and——"

"Quite so. Has there been any telegram for me?"

"No, sir. Mr. Alton and a number of other gentlemen have called up constantly but I had to tell them I didn't know where you were."

"That's right. No telegram you say?"

"None at all, sir."

"Nothing from Nevada?"

Judson knew all about Neyland's love affair. Neyland's business mail all went to his office down town and only personal letters came to the apartment.

"Only one letter, sir."

"A letter! For God's sake where is it? Why didn't you give it to me—why——"

"Here it is, sir," said Judson, taking it from the table.

The wretched man caught it quickly; one glance and he recognized the handwriting. He laughed horribly as he turned it over in his hand.

"Too late," he said at last, for the moment oblivious of Judson.

"What do you mean, sir?" asked the valet, who was so well trained that nothing but a crisis of this kind would have made him venture upon so personal a question.

"Nothing, nothing. Just go, that's all."

"Very good, sir."

"Before you go, make me the strongest pick-me-up you can concoct."

While this was preparing he sat down in a collapsed heap, holding the letter crumpled in his hand and staring at it half uncomprehendingly.

"Here it is, sir," said Judson bringing him a brimming glass. "You'll feel better if you drink that and take a hot bath, sir. I wish you'd let me——"

"I know, but I'll fix it myself."

"Beg pardon, sir," said the man, "but that stock deal, sir, you are——"

"It's of no consequence," answered Neyland, anxious to be rid of the man.

"Some of the gentlemen are getting very anxious about you, sir. Mr. Alton's been here half a dozen times."

"Has it failed?"

"No sir, it's all right yet. They think tomorrow——"

"Very well, go."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE PLEA OF THE BROKEN

It was with the utmost reluctance that Judson left the apartment, but in the face of his master's repeated and even angry commands he had no option. He loved Neyland in spite of his weakness, perhaps because of it. Never before had he been driven from him when he came home in such a condition. Always his ministrations—and he knew exactly what to do for him—had been not only suffered but anxiously demanded. There had been something so terribly different about Neyland's demeanour in this instance that he was now alarmed beyond measure. He went down into the street and stood hesitating, the more frightened because he had heard Neyland shoot the bolt of the dead-latch of the door behind him so that Judson could not readmit himself with his key if he dared to try it.

Alton, as representative of the syndicate, had called in person every day and he and others had telephoned nearly every hour. There was something very serious the matter, evidently. Although Judson possessed a great deal of his master's

confidence, which was always respected, he was only a valet after all and he felt quite unequal to the situation. He must get assistance. Alton, of course, occurred to him but for some strange reason he did not feel like appealing to him. There had been an estrangement of late between his master and Colonel Tayloe, but the valet remembered that the old Colonel had formerly been Neyland's best friend. He would go to him and ask his advice.

Judson hailed a passing taxicab and directed the driver to hurry to Mr. Warburton's house where he knew Colonel Tayloe was living and where, as it was now past business hours, he fancied the Colonel might be found, especially since the old man among other pleasant pursuits usually enjoyed a canter in the park in the late afternoon. He was fortunate enough to intercept the Colonel just as he was about to mount his horse before the door of the house.

Colonel Tayloe was in high spirits. The great battle on the stock exchange was progressing favourably. He alone knew that Warburton would win. The little Italian Duke had returned that morning bringing back his beloved Duchess, the Colonel's only daughter. Rose stood in the doorway watching her father. There was a second horse before the door. At that instant the little Duke appeared in the doorway, paused on the threshold, kissed her, and then descended to the Colonel on the sidewalk. By his dress he was also minded for a ride.

In his excitement Judson flung himself out of the taxicab before it was fairly stopped and rushed unceremoniously up to the old man.

"You are Colonel Tayloe, sir," burst out the excited man impulsively. "I've often seen you with my master."

"Well, as I live, it's Neyland's man!" exclaimed the Colonel looking at him narrowly.

"Yes sir, I'm Judson, sir," returned the perfectly trained Englishman, striving to recover some of his composure and to speak normally.

Rose came down the steps, having heard what had been said, and stopped by her father's side. The Duke drew nearer, having first thoughtfully bidden the grooms lead the horses across the street. The newcomer's bearing indicated something serious.

"I came to you for help, sir. Perhaps I had better speak to you in private."

"This is my son-in-law and this my daughter. They have both been very fond of Mr. Neyland. Is anything the matter with him?"

"Yes sir, that is to say—er——"

The man was reluctant indeed to discuss his master's shame.

"Good God!" said the Colonel, "has he been on another debauch?"

"Yes, sir."

"Poor Chrissey," murmured the old man.

"Well," began the Duke, "how does that concern——"

"It's this way, sir," said Judson, "he came home in an awful state and he wouldn't let me do anything for him. He drove me out of the apartment and locked the door behind him. I'm afraid."

"Afraid of what?" asked the Colonel staring at the man.

"He might do himself some harm, sir. The fact is he sent a telegram to Nevada last Tuesday and he waited all day for an answer and it didn't come and then, while I was out, he went away and he just came back in a horrible state, sir. The first thing he asked for was a telegram."

"Was there any?" asked the Colonel.

"No, sir, only a letter. He gets all his business mail at the office. Only letters from Nevada come to the house."

"I see, and was this——"

"Yes, sir. I gave him a bracer and I left him but I'm afraid, sir. He's worse than I ever saw him, sir, and somehow different."

"It's no concern of mine," said the Colonel grimly, "and he's fighting my best friend."

"I know, sir, but if you could see him now, Colonel Tayloe. He has been a good master to me, and I'm afraid."

"Father," said Rose, "you will go instantly to Mr. Neyland's rooms and if you won't go Enrico shall."

"But it is a most delicate matter, my dear Rose," protested the Duke.

"I see it all," said the new Duchess; "you told me Chris got her divorce."

"Yes, last Monday."

"He expected her to wire him and she didn't do it and he couldn't stand it."

"There's something in that."

"Perhaps she has seen what a poor wretched man he is and she doesn't care for him. And oh, don't you see he drank because his heart was broken and now——"

"The Duchess is right," said the little Duke, "as always. You are in an alliance with Mr. Warburton, my dear sir. Naturally you hesitate, but I will go."

"Oh, thank you sir, thank you," cried the valet. "You are so kind. I have a taxicab right here."

A messenger boy on a bicycle drew up before the sidewalk where the three men stood talking.

"Telegram for Colonel Tayloe," he said.

"Why didn't you telephone it?" he said.

"It was addressed to your office, sir. They couldn't get you there, so they telephoned it to our Madison Avenue office and sent me around, sir."

"Just a moment," said the Colonel putting on his glasses. "You sign for it, Duke," he continued as he thrust his thumb into the envelope. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed as he read the message. "Chrissey de Selden is on her way to New York. She will arrive on the Lake Shore Limited from

Chicago at five-thirty. It wants fifteen minutes of that now. Duke, will you go to meet her?"

"But Mr. Neyland, sir," interposed the indomitable Judson.

"I'll go to him myself," said the Colonel, "after I change my clothes."

"Don't stop for anything," said the practical Rose, "go just as you are. The taxi can take you to Mr. Neyland's. I'll have the car around in a jiffy for Enrico. I'd go myself if I were only dressed."

"God bless these women!" said the Colonel, scrambling into the cab in his riding clothes.

"Take the horses to the stable and tell the chauffeur to bring around the Pierce-Arrow immediately. Hurry," he heard his daughter say to the head groom as the cab rolled swiftly down the avenue.

"What do you think, *carina*?" asked the Duke, amused at her prompt decision and admiring her more than ever.

"I think if father doesn't get to Richard Neyland he may kill himself and I don't know what effect that will have on Chris. I can't understand her. Love is so straightforward with you and me but it seems wretchedly tangled with her. You'll meet her, Enrico. You'll receive her kindly. Say nothing about Mr. Neyland. Remember how miserable she has been. Tell her that her telegram came late, that I was not dressed or I should have come with you."

"I obey," said the Duke, kissing her hand with the fervour of pre-marriage days.

He was more in love than ever with his beautiful wife and as the car came around to the door he sprang into it and drove away.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE PASSING

As he shot the dead-bolt in the door behind the departing Judson, Neyland experienced a brief, transient sensation of relief. Whatever his plans he was now free to work them out without interruption.

Stop! One connection still remained between him and the outside world. As he staggered back from his private hall to the big library he was conscious of a ringing sound somewhere. In his benumbed, confused state he did not realize at first what it was or where it came from. He could not identify it. He only knew that the sharp clanging tore his already wrecked nerves to shreds. He stood trembling and listening, praying that it would stop. Finally it came to him that it was the telephone bell. He could soon settle that. He stumbled over to it, took the connecting wire in his hands and jerked it savagely free from the box. The last tie that bound him to the world without was broken.

The bracer that Judson had made for him had cleared his head and steadied his nerves a little.

He went over to his desk, sat down before it, drew out a sheet of paper, and seized a pen. It was a task of incredible difficulty for him to write legibly with his twitching hands. Sheet after sheet he scrawled and blotted in vain. What could he do?

Fortunately there was still something left of the bracer in the glass Judson had given him. He had only drunk about half of it. He seized the glass avidly and swallowed it down hard although his feeling was one of loathing. It steadied him a little and by a mighty effort at concentration and control he managed to write these few words:

Not hearing from you I fell again. I woke up in hell where I belong. I have won from Warburton but I have been beaten in the greater thing after all. Even to think of you is profanation to you. I know that you do not love me. I could not live honourably with you. I could not allow you to marry the rotten, degraded, helpless thing I am. Our children would rise up and curse me. But in spite of my weakness I love you. If I had known you before I might have been a different man. Don't reproach yourself. You cannot help it. Good-bye, Chris, good-bye.

He hesitated a long time staring at the blurred words that seemed somehow to run themselves together. Finally he lifted the pen again and added these words:

May God [he wrote painfully and slowly], if there is any God—I will know that soon—bless you and may He be not too hard on me. I love you greatly

and I take myself out of your way. That is something, isn't it? ,

He folded the letter crookedly, badly, thrust it into an envelope, sealed it after a fashion, and scrawled her name on it. The effort was almost beyond him. He sank back in the chair when he had finished, white, ghastly, sweat beading his brow. But he could not rest, not yet. He still had something else to do. Another letter had to be written. With even more deliberation than before he wrote:

I'm not worthy of her. Who can minister to a body and mind alike diseased? Not she, not any one. Everything of which I die possessed I have left to her. Colonel Tayloe, you have been a good friend to me. If any man could have helped me you would have done so; if any woman, she. It is no one's fault but my own. Let no one else be blamed. Will you see that my wishes are carried out? There ought to be a great deal for her after tomorrow.

He signed this letter firmly with his full name, the other letter had not been subscribed. She would know and understand. It was important that his signature to this document should be unmistakable and he forced his nerves into submission for the moment. He slipped the letter to her inside this letter, placed them both in a larger envelope, which he directed to Colonel Tayloe. He arose, staggered over to the mantel, and with

trembling hands placed the letter on the shelf where it could not fail to be seen by any one entering the room.

Turning back from a drawer of the desk he took a small, heavy automatic pistol, which he slowly made ready to fire. Carrying it in his right hand he went over to the table. There lay the crumpled letter from Chrissey de Selden just as he had dropped it after he had locked the door on the valet and had gone to the writing desk. He laid the automatic down on the table, picked up the letter, smoothed it out, and with shaking hands started to tear the envelope. He would go on his last journey with her last message, with words from her, before his eyes and in his heart.

With the envelope half-torn open he stopped and withdrew his finger. He was not worthy of any word from her. He would not look. If she loved him it would only make his task harder. If she did not he would rather not know. And by his restraint he could punish himself a little more. He would not look. No one, not even she, would ever know how much that decision cost him.

He had fought, he had triumphed, he had failed. In that in which he had triumphed he found neither condonation nor compensation for that in which he had failed. He did not know what the future would hold for him but he knew that no hell could be worse than that in which he now lingered. Holding the letter in his hand for a moment he pressed it to his lips and strove to think only of

her, but athwart his vision of her came the picture of that nameless woman in the mean room whence he had just come. He had been associated with many women but somehow none of them came to him as this unknown outcast of the street. That was the horror of this ending. She would not down, this unnamed woman.

He groaned aloud. He was not to be permitted a last thought only of her he loved. No, it was not meet that he should read her words. No, it was not right that he should even hold the letter. He made a movement to unclasp his fingers but that was too much. He transferred it to his left hand, the heart hand, and clutched it desperately. With his other hand he seized the weapon.

Should he sit down? He decided to stand. He faced the mantel. Her picture was there. He would not look at it. He closed his eyes. The fingers of his right hand tightened on the automatic. There was death and whatever might be beyond in that hand. He lifted both hands, the left with love and life above his head as if in appeal, the other breast high——

CHAPTER XXXV

BRAVE MAN OR COWARD?

THE door-bell of the apartment rang insistently. The Colonel and the valet stood without.

"Try the knob again," said the Colonel.

"It's no use, sir," answered Judson. "My key won't unlock the dead-latch. I heard him shoot it behind me. See, sir."

He twisted the knob and even shook the door violently. It did not yield. The Colonel reached his hand out the second time and pressed the bell.

Is there a difference between the sound of a bell ringing in rooms that are unoccupied and the sound it makes where life is present?

"Maybe he's in another stupor," said the Colonel.

"No," said the valet, his face white. The man wrung his hands. "Oh, sir, let me break down the door."

"Very well." Judson had been a soldier. He still was young and vigorous. The Colonel looked at him closely. "I believe you can manage it," said the old officer.

"Yes, sir, I'm sure I can. Please stand aside, sir."

The door was at the end of a hall. Judson backed away as far from it as he could, then ran swiftly and hurled himself against it. The panels gave, the bolt slipped, the door crashed open, and Judson fell headlong into the private foyer. Colonel Tayloe stepped over him, ran forward into the library, and stopped.

Surely the noise of the forcing of the door would have awakened any one but a dead man, but no earthly sound could awaken Richard Neyland. He lay on his back at full length in front of the mantel. The automatic rested on the floor hard by his right hand. His left hand was still tightly clenched.

The Colonel had seen death too many times not to recognize it, even though Neyland's coat had fallen so that it concealed the gaping wound over his heart. Neyland's eyes were wide open. They seemed not yet to have set in the ghastly stare of dissolution. There was a little smile upon his lips, a smile of pride, of resolve, of anxiety, of shame, of despair. In the face of the tempest-tossed was a great calm.

The Colonel took off his hat. It was Judson who broke the silence.

"Oh God!" he wailed, "he's done it. I feared it."

He knelt down by the side of the dead and bowed his head over his master. Tears that were not unmanly fell upon that master's breast.

So Richard Neyland passed. Dead by his own hand! Brave man or coward? It was over, over. Triumph and defeat, temptation and resistance, love and despair—no more.

We are the makers of our own fate, the engineers of our own design, the shapers of our own end. Ah, but is that true? How many generations of men who drank and of women, too, had gone to debase the ichor that filled this man's veins and that made him weak? He had fought hard and he had loved much. In the end he had failed, but as he lay there dead it seemed to the Colonel that perhaps he had made some sort of atonement. Was it because of that he looked so whitely peaceful?

The old man stooped down and unclasped that left hand. Neyland had had no lasting grip on death with the right hand. Coincident with purpose served he had as he fell cast the weapon from him, and there it lay, its work accomplished, rejected—like Neyland himself perhaps. But he had clung to love and life with the other hand. Not even in the articles of death had he let go of all that had been left him of her. Death had mastered him but love had triumphed. And was it for that he seemed so calmly at rest?

The Colonel took the crumpled letter, smoothed it out, looked at it, observing that Neyland had faltered and stopped in his purpose to open it and to read it, and then he thrust it into the pocket of his coat. The handwriting was familiar.

He recognized it instantly. Judson, too, had risen.

"Steady, man, steady," said the Colonel, laying his hand on the other's shoulder.

Judson, striving to control his agitation, caught sight of the letter on the mantel.

"This is for you, sir," he said after a glance at the envelope.

The Colonel looked at it, read the address, and put it in his pocket with the other letter.

"You will say nothing about these letters, Judson, until I give you leave."

"No, sir, of course not."

And the next moment the room was filled with people. The servants of the house had heard the crash of the forced door. Some of them had previously heard a muffled sound like a shot although they had given it no attention until the elevator boy, passing up and down, reported that the apartment had been broken into and the door was open. Thereupon the hall man had summoned a policeman. An ubiquitous reporter, who happened to be passing by, had also dropped in.

Owing to a freight wreck on the road the limited train was two hours late. The Colonel had telephoned to Rose the dreadful tidings and when the Duke had telephoned that he would wait for the delayed train she had told him and had said that she would join her husband and they would meet the train together.

It was a beautiful, if unhappy, woman they

welcomed as she stepped down to the platform in the Grand Central Station. Chrissey de Selden's health had been fully restored, but there was an anxiety in her voice and bearing which was patent to her friends. They greeted her warmly and although it was but a short distance to the Biltmore they took her there in the car. As they were about to enter the door a newsboy thrust in her face a late edition.

"Extree!" he shouted. "All about the suicide of Richard Neyland of the great anti-Warburton combination."

The Duke caught her by the arm.

"Dear lady," he said quickly, "not here."

He thought she was going to faint in the entrance. It was fortunate that Rose had come along. The Duke had already reserved her suite of rooms. She was heavily veiled and they managed to get her to her apartment without attracting attention. When the door closed and they were alone she confronted them. She threw back her veil and stared at them, her face horribly drawn.

"Is it true?" she asked.

The Duke nodded.

"Dear lady, unfortunately, yes."

Chrissey de Selden shuddered as Rose stepped closer to her side and put her arm about her.

"I did it," she said. "I killed him."

BOOK VII
THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE PRICE FOR FOLLY

FOR the divisions of Chrissey there were great searchings of heart. Her pursuit of happiness had led her, as such quests often do, to a hideous impasse. She found herself fettered by circumstances, bound by conditions, which she conceived herself powerless to alter in the least degree. Her career had been marked by a pitiful indecision, by a complete failure to comprehend the situation, by a blind inability to discern her own heart, and a want of power to see where her true happiness did lie.

Neyland's death had been a horrible shock to her; especially as she had not spoken lightly or unadvisedly when she said that she had killed him. Reflection had intensified her in that appalling conviction. She would have given her life if she could have restored him to life, but she was clear-headed enough, even in her passionate remorse, her ruthless self-accusation, to realize that she never could have married him. No, not even to save his life, she had almost said his soul, could she have brought herself to that!

Her grief was founded on the fact that she had not realized that before. She had been blind. Once her eyes were opened, she had seen clearly that she could not have gone through with that marriage. The very fact that she had already gone through one loveless marriage made it impossible to give herself to Neyland.

Therefore, in all her humiliation and reproach and contrition, which were genuine and abiding and which would probably never leave her altogether, she never for one moment allowed herself to admit that she would have prevented the catastrophe by marrying him. Nor could she delude herself by arguing that she could have averted this deplorable ending of all his hopes and struggles. His recent letters showed that.

There is no illuminant like a great passion and this in spite of the proverb about the blinding power of love. She frankly admitted now that she loved the man who had been her husband. That she had irrevocably put him away intensified the depth of feeling with which she longed to give herself to him. And in the light of that great passion which in defiance alike of every law of growth, every theory of possibility, or every fact of experience, had suddenly flamed up in her heart she realized what she had meant to Neyland. Nothing but her whole heart would have sufficed him. Her mere bodily presence without that would have made the failure to maintain his moral

standards the more inevitable and agonizing to them both.

It seemed to her that in order to be true to her ideas and ideals Neyland had to be sacrificed. Yet her sorrow for Neyland was profound. And the more she dwelt upon his ending, the more grievously it affected her. She set these things clearly before her and looked them sadly but bravely in the face.

Perhaps after all there is a sense in which love blinds. It blinded Chrissey de Selden to the state of Warburton's heart. It did not occur to her for a single moment that he could still love her. He ought not to love her. She looked upon herself as a bad woman deserving of punishment. Oh, not guilty of the greater sins of commission, but of lesser faults, bad enough. Nor could she escape from the conclusion that everything that had happened had been more her own fault than that of any other. The best that she could say for herself was that she had been a fool.

Sometimes the price for folly is higher than for sin. The sinner usually gets some sort of an exchange; the fool, nothing. She heaped ashes and dust upon her head. In that condition she asked nothing. She could not ask. She had forfeited any right to appeal. She expected nothing. She hoped nothing. What could she expect? What could she hope? Her punishment appeared greater than she could bear, yet she had to bear it.

She approached the matter again and again from every angle. But for her love for Warburton she would have said she was a Frankenstein, a woman without a soul, without a heart. She was frightened not only because she could not mourn for Neyland but because she was actually relieved at his death. She could not escape the consciousness that the problem he presented had been solved by that pistol shot.

As she saw herself mercilessly so she saw Neyland. She realized his weakness. Although she was fain not to dwell upon it there was a certain fascination in so doing because that weakness justified her action. She sought earnestly to think upon his good qualities but other things would obtrude. *De mortuis nil nisi—malum!* And for that there were bitter reproach and shame!

Believing herself in love with him she had condoned that insult at Sorrento but she had not forgot it. Again it bulked large and hateful in her thoughts. It seemed to her that Neyland had somehow branded her and that she was still his possession because of that. She had thrown his bracelet away. She had burned his letters. But that was the one thing that would not be obliterated. Sometimes, as she thought on it she found herself tearing her dress open to see if there were any outward mark. And sometimes to her distraught fancy the red branding hand seemed outlined on her white flesh.

She had sought to put everything of Neyland's

out of her life. There was one thing, however, that still remained. A few months before he had sent her an envelope not to be opened until he should die although he had no expectation of death then. She remembered the letter which had brought the sealed packet to her and how full of the joy of life and hope and courage it had been. After Neyland's funeral she had opened that envelope.

It contained his will. He had left all he had to her. His letters had convinced her that his operations on the stock exchange, which she yet had not the faintest idea had turned out unsuccessfully, had materially increased his fortune. Of course, as she had put her whole means at his disposal she too had shared in the profits. She had not the faintest idea that the combination had failed and that Neyland and Alton and their backers had not only been beaten but ruined. She did not dream that her fortune had been entirely swept away.

The newspapers the next afternoon had been full of the collapse of the combination, the triumph of Warburton. She had read nothing. Life had held but one interest to her in those hours—the death of Neyland. She never doubted but that he had won and that she was richer than ever before. The assurance of success had been too thorough for her to dream of anything else.

There were two decisions to which she had come. First she would accept none of Neyland's money, not one dollar of it. Second, her share of the

profits of the big deal she would make over to Warburton, whom she thought ruined, without resources. Neyland had said that she ought to double her fortune, so that with so large an amount a man like Warburton could soon recoup himself.

She could not go to Neyland's funeral. There had been publicity enough. Her name had not been coupled with Neyland's suicide, which was universally ascribed to nervous depression following his last debauch, brought about by the excitement of his deal in the stock exchange. But society had expected a marriage between the two since her divorce and much unpleasant comment, which was already current, would have been more difficult to bear if her whereabouts had become known.

She had sent for no newspapers. The fact that he was dead, the manner of his death, had been enough for her. She was in no mood to read. The course of the world did not interest her then. Neyland was dead; she was separated for ever from Warburton. Nothing else mattered.

Not until long after did she learn anything of that great day. Alton's backers came out into the open and despite the defection of Neyland fought boldly. Old Huntley refused to turn over his stock. The conspirators, met by a demand for actual stock, sought secretly and vainly with the three millions from escrow and the last of their resources to buy enough stock to make good their sales. They were caught in the trap. Warburton himself came

on the floor of the exchange just before closing, and amid a pandemonium of mad excitement drove them to the wall, while surging masses of men, shrieking like demoniacs, surrounded the battlers on this day of unparalleled triumph and disaster. The world of finance never would forget Warburton, cool, imperturbable, buying, buying with damnable persistence, with unconquerable determination, while about him raged the unleashed storm of human passions on that eventful morning.

In those last mad moments the conspirators lost everything. The price of the I-O stock went skyrocketing. At the close of the exchange it stood at five hundred dollars per share! Warburton had won. Everybody heard the public announcement which usually follows such battles, that the firm of Alton & Neyland, being unable to meet its obligations, must go into liquidation. In those last hours Warburton had doubled his fortune and more. His enemies had failed to wrest the road from him. They had failed to break him in fortune though they had ruined themselves in the attempt, and one of them at least had sacrificed the fortune of the woman he loved and thrown his own life into the maelstrom.

The happiest man was old farmer Huntley, whose prudence and sagacity and judgment were so abundantly justified by the event in the eyes of his fellow townsmen. Warburton could not take much comfort in his success because the only thing that made success worth anything to him

had just passed out of his reach for ever. As he thought it over he wondered if it had been worth while, if he would not have been happier if he had let the others win and had gone out into the world beggared of fortune as he was beggared of wife. Strictly incognito in her apartments at the Biltmore, visited at first only by her good friend the Duchess, who had been charged by her father to tell her nothing, she knew nothing. The wild excitement of that short day following the suicide passed her by quite unheeding.

The suicide of Neyland on the eve of the deciding moment after an absence of four days might alone have wrought the ruin of the combination. Indeed to the uninformed it seemed to be the cause of the failure. But the big men knew differently. At the end of the day, ruined, bankrupt, desperate, many of them, and shaken and bruised all of them, they were forced to confess that Warburton had beaten them at their own game and that without regard to the suicide. He would not have lost though a thousand Neylands had been present.

The world looked on in a state of mingled admiration and terror at this struggle of Titans. For love of a woman, for hate of a man, to wreak a revenge, Neyland had brought hundreds to ruin, nay, even thousands, for in the general crash that went with the battle, remote and subsidiary interests extending in outreaching ramifications through the whole country were involved. Indeed it was Warburton himself who, having ground his major

enemies to powder, eventually stopped the "bear" panic and enabled small "bears" at least to save themselves. Warburton's endeavour had always been constructive rather than destructive and as usual, having gained the victory, he had used it mercifully.

His wife's fortune had been so involved in the deal that with the best will in the world Warburton had been unable to protect it. Neyland's, of course, had disappeared. Instead of inheriting any considerable sum from him, instead of having doubled her own holdings, she was a ruined woman and but for the money upon her person, her jewels, and her private belongings she was without resource. And again of that she was in happy ignorance. It was Warburton's intention to restore her fortune to her and to that end he and Colonel Tayloe consulted long and planned variously.

Inevitably the duty of informing Chrissey de Selden of that determination or the bringing it about without her knowledge if possible had devolved upon Colonel Tayloe. He had not seen her since the suicide. His presence had been necessary in the battle on the stock exchange and the next day, Sunday, the funeral arrangements of Neyland had also devolved upon him. Billy Alton, who had also lost everything, was incapable of rendering any assistance. Less far-sighted than others he had been inclined to put much blame upon the shoulders of the dead man and his habits. It never occurred to Billy to wonder how

much he and others like him had been responsible for the developing of such habits in Neyland.

Colonel Tayloe had arranged through Rose to see Chrissey de Selden on Monday afternoon, the day after the funeral. Rose had been Chrissey's only support. When the latter would talk Rose had talked and only of what Chrissey wished to talk. When she would sit silent Rose had fallen in with her mood. She had shown herself that rare thing, a perfect friend. The little Duke was tact and discretion itself. The impetuous and enthusiastic Rose had not failed to learn something from her devoted husband in the short period of married life. Indeed her course had largely been dictated by that flower of modern chivalry that had blossomed upon the still fructifying soil of that ancient Italian nobility.

CHAPTER XXXVII

ANOTHER CHANCE

"My dear girl," began the Colonel, "I'm sick at heart over the present situation. I know what the death of poor Richard Neyland must have been to you. Just as you had secured your divorce and were about to marry him——"

"Colonel Tayloe," said Chrissey, interrupting him swiftly, "I intend to talk freely with you. You will respect my confidence?"

"Absolutely."

"I was not going to marry Richard Neyland."

"What?"

"No."

"I thought——"

"Yes and I thought and he thought and we all thought, but we all thought wrong, I more than any one. Ever since that day in Sorrento I've been in a whirl of excitement. Until I went to Nevada I didn't take time to draw a quiet breath. One thing succeeded another. I was swept, as it were, by a mighty current. But out there in the mountains, alone, quiet, I saw things differently."

"You mean?"

"I found I didn't love Mr. Neyland." The Colonel stared in astonishment as she went on. "You will think me weak and vacillating. You will despise me."

"Despise a woman for not knowing her own heart?"

"That is good of you. I didn't know it. I think the man somehow fascinated me until I realized his weakness. I knew in my soul that not even with me could he conquer it. Perhaps if I had believed that he could I might have gone on, but his letters, everything, showed me that he could not, and if I could not and did not love him what was to be gained by sacrificing myself to him?"

"Nothing."

"I knew what the obligations of a loveless marriage were, at least it was an unloving marriage then."

"Chrissey," said the old Colonel, coming closer to her and taking her by the shoulders with both hands. "Look me in the face, dear child. Do you love your husband?"

"He isn't my husband, but—I do."

"What!"

"Why should I hesitate to confess it to you? Nothing can ever come of it now but I know at last that I love him. I'm not fit to be his servant, but I love him just the same, the more because I didn't realize it until too late."

"But when did you realize it?"

"I didn't let myself realize it until I got my divorce, but I know now that I began to love him that evening in Bermuda—has he told you of it?"

The Colonel nodded.

"When he would have killed Mr. Neyland had I not prevented. That was the day he told me to get the divorce after what he had seen and I thought he hated me. I was sure he loathed me, he despised me. He might well have done so, not because I had committed any but venial sins in my heart. Save for what has been visible in my course, I am as fit to be a wife as Rose."

"No one ever dreamed otherwise."

"I thank you. And now that I have told you the truth you will never mention it to a soul, and we won't speak of it again."

"But my dear child——"

"Oh, don't interrupt me. I've got more to tell you and if I'm stopped I couldn't gather up my thoughts again."

"Go on."

"Although I did not love him and although I had determined not to marry him I still feel that I killed Richard Neyland."

"What do you mean?"

"I wrote him a letter in which I told him that I had found out at last that I did not and could not love him, that marriage with him was impossible, that even if I married him I could not conceal the fact that I did not love him, and that such a

knowledge would probably render it more difficult than ever for him to—you understand."

"Of course."

"He got that letter. It took away the last of his resisting power. The Duke said he drank heavily afterwards. When he read it I think it drove him out of his mind and when he came to himself, in part at least, and realized that his hopes were to be without fruition, that I was lost to him, that he had fallen, he killed himself."

"But, my dear girl——"

"There is nothing you can say that can change that conclusion."

"Isn't there?" asked the Colonel, grimly feeling in his pocket for certain papers which he was suddenly minded not yet to produce. "Go on."

"I have suffered greatly ever since that night at Sorrento. Through me Mr. Neyland is dead and Mr. Warburton is ruined and I am alone, but it doesn't seem to me that I have suffered enough. I ask myself how much I have believed in the goodness of God. I ask myself how much of my sorrow comes from the knowledge that I have offended Him, that I have broken the laws of Holy Church, and how much of it comes from the fact that I didn't know my own mind. Oh, I don't know. I suppose all these uncertainties and doubts contribute to my punishment, which has indeed seemed more than I can bear and yet I am bearing it. We always say that and yet we bear it, don't we?"

[“We must.”

“But I feel that I have not been punished enough. Do you know I think I’ve been a—what do you call that ancient philosophy? Oh, I recall it, hedonism—I’ve been a hedonist. Pleasure has been the end of action. I wanted to be happy. You see I was so young. It didn’t seem fair and so I have defied God and man and I am the unhappiest woman on earth. Mr. Neyland is dead and Mr. Warburton is ruined and I am alone,” she repeated with a sort of desperation, a touching monotony indeed.

“As for poor Neyland I cannot say, but Warburton is the unhappiest man on earth,” said the Colonel impulsively.

“Does he take his ruin so hardly?”

“It’s not that, but go on.”

“And I must be punished more. If I could expiate my weakness on this earth I should be so glad and so I look to you to help me. I am always asking someone to help me, am I not?” she questioned piteously.

“You shall not ask me in vain, dear girl. What is it that you wish? But if I may offer one suggestion I think you ought to go away.”

“I am going to Bermuda. You can advise me on all business matters and things of that kind, no one better, but there is an old Priest down there, Father Smith—have you heard of him by any chance?”

“Yes, I have even met him, when I was last in Bermuda, myself.”

"He was very good to me. He pointed out the right way and strove to guide me therein. I am going to him. The *Bermudian* sails next Wednesday. I wish you to get me passage for myself and maid and if it is not taken engage 'Whileaway' for me again."

"Humph," said the Colonel. "Go on."

"And here," continued the woman producing the packet, "is Mr. Neyland's will. He sent it to me in Nevada. I destroyed everything else connected with him. I even threw his bracelet away, but I could not destroy a paper like this, so I brought it back intending to return it. After he died I opened it. He leaves me everything of which he dies possessed, being without other relatives and no friend so dear as I, he says." Her voice faltered. "I'm ashamed that I feel only relief. But I must not inflict that upon you. I want everything that comes to me by this will to be turned into money and all the profits he made from that great combination against Mr. Warburton to be added to the sum, every dollar of it."

"I see."

"He said that it would be more than doubled by his operations if they succeeded. Is the amount a large one?"

"These securities," said the Colonel glancing over the list quickly and striving to think more clearly, "have a face value of over a million dollars and if they were doubled the total estate would be between two and three millions."

"Yes. Well I'm going to devote that to good works. I cannot, will not touch it myself but I can make somebody happy with it and perhaps in that way win some blessing upon his memory. You know him, you know his family history, you know how he struggled, how he was tempted; don't you think that he has some chance?"

"My dear Chrissey," answered the Colonel quietly, "as I am sure even the best of us is not good enough to be saved on his own merits so I believe even the worst of us is not bad enough to be damned for his own sins, no, nor for those of his fathers."

"I wish I could believe that."

"You must believe it. It's the only sensible view to take."

"Perhaps. I hope so anyway. You will attend to this, won't you? I suppose I'll have to sign papers or something to give you the power."

"That will be easy."

"And then there is my own fortune. You remember in what shape it was?"

"Perfectly."

"I gave it all to Mr. Neyland to use. He said he would not use it until the last minute but he wrote me that it was necessary. In fact, he said that what I put in had finally decided the battle. And I presume it has doubled, too."

"Your logic is irrefutable," was the evasive answer.

"I don't want to crush Mr. Warburton. As I

see it now I would have been glad if he had beaten the others but since he was beaten I want him to have something to start with again."

"My dear girl——"

"Yes. I wasn't loyal to Mr. Neyland but he thought so and I let him think it. I forced myself to be on his side."

"I understand."

"But what was really back of my action was that I might have something to give back. Do you think I could take any profit from a man I loved any more than I could from a man I didn't love? So all that has come to me is to go back to Mr. Warburton. You will arrange that also?"

"My dear Chrissey," exclaimed the Colonel, "do you know what you ask? Can you think of any power on earth that could make John Warburton take such money?"

"I don't know. I'll have to leave it to you."

"But you can't leave the impossible to me."

"I must. I should like to give him everything. It wouldn't be a tithe to what he had lost through me."

"My dear," said the Colonel, "when he lost you he lost everything that made life worth living."

Chrissey de Selden's heart leaped in her bosom.

"It's good of you to say so," she said, fighting for self-control, "but I think it can't make much difference to him now. He told me to get a divorce and——"

The Colonel was in a delicate position. He was

the recipient of so many confidences and so many aspirations that he did not see his way clear at that moment.

"We will let that pass," he said; "meanwhile what you ask is impossible. Warburton wouldn't take the money from you. I couldn't persuade him to it."

"I don't want you to persuade him. I know that he would have nothing from me, he hates me, but you must find some plan for saving something from the wreck. Make him believe that some things have been overlooked that he had forgotten."

"I deceive a man like Warburton in a business transaction," laughed the Colonel. "Make him believe that he had overlooked anything at all! Why, Chris, dear, have you gone mad?"

"Indeed I think I have," answered the girl. "Now I really can't stand much more. I've told you everything. I have opened my whole heart to you. You must do these two things. You must turn Mr. Neyland's fortune into money and hold it for me and put John Warburton in possession of every dollar that I have won and when I reach Bermuda I will write you further what to do."

"But my dear girl."

"Oh, Colonel, I'm tried beyond endurance. Won't you leave me alone now and come again tomorrow?"

"I'll be here early in the morning, say about half-past nine, and perhaps I shall have news for you," said the old man as he took his departure.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

BROKEN HONOUR

THE Colonel was glad to leave. He wanted time to collect his thoughts and to decide upon some course of action. He had come there prepared to tell Chrissey de Selden everything, and he found himself confronted with such a totally different set of conditions that he was at a loss what to do.

As he went home he revolved the situation in his mind and considered above everything his promise to be silent. It was an obligation impossible to keep. He was as nice on the point of honour as any man on earth. Meticulous, his business associates called him, and he had kept his word to his own hurt many a time. Now he was asked to keep it to the hurt of Chrissey de Selden and John Warburton. He was also asked by these two to do things diametrically opposed.

It was an unprecedented situation. As nice customs courtesy to great kings so invariable laws must sometimes be broken, even when they are laws of honour. The Colonel had two counsellors in whom he could confide and whose advice he could ask, counsellors who held the two parties concerned

in as deep an affection as he held them, and to them he repaired.

It was still early in the afternoon. The Duke had not gone down-town and he and Rose were in the library. They had not ceased to be lovers although six months married and they were never so happy as in their own society.

"Attavanti," began Colonel Tayloe, "I know you to be a man of unblemished integrity with a sense of honour worthy of the finest traditions of the Old Dominion."

The Duke bowed, his face flushing a little with pride at this commendation from an old man whose opinion he had learned to value, although he had no idea what was this Old Dominion referred to, and the Duchess put her arm around her father's neck and kissed him warmly in high appreciation.

"And I know that Rose, my daughter, is well worthy of association with you on those or any other terms."

"You voice my sincerest conviction, sir," said the Duke.

"Now I am about to do what I never did in my life before, what I never thought to do."

"And what is that, Father?" asked Rose.

"Let us all sit down," said the Colonel, glancing at the door and seeing that it was shut. "It's a long story. Duke, I'm going to break my plighted word of honour. Can you conceive of any situation in which a gentleman would be justified in so doing?"

The Duke paused a little space, his head bent, his brow wrinkled, his cigarette neglected in his hand. It was indeed a grave question. Rose, who was learning not to interrupt in serious crises, waited breathlessly for his reply.

"Yes," said the Italian at last, "I can. A gentleman may break his plighted word for a woman. Perhaps in some cases he even must do that."

"Exactly," said the Colonel triumphantly. "It is wonderful how much alike are Italy as you represent it and old Virginia as I do."

"There is no nationality between gentlemen, sir," said Di Attavanti. "The laws of honour and its obligations are alike everywhere."

"Quite so. Well, I gave my word of honour to Chrissey de Selden, not half an hour ago, that I would not reveal what she told me, but I'm going to break it now."

"Allow me," said the Duke gravely, "in a matter so serious as this, which involves your honour, I am sure you have not come to your conclusion without due reflection."

There was a little note of interrogation in the observation which bespoke the nice sensitiveness of the little Italian.

"You may be sure of that," answered the Colonel; "I've thought of nothing else since I left her."

"Knowing you personally and through my wife as well I am sure that your decision is undoubtedly right," went on the Duke.

"Thank you."

"And as it is your honour we will cherish it sacredly so long as you require."

"Dear Father, how long will you two men fence with each other? Frankly, I'm dying to know what it is. Anything that may promote Chrissey's happiness and take the agony out of her heart—heavens, I wouldn't think of honour for a minute!"

"My Rose, the sentiment does credit to your heart if not to your soul," observed her husband.

"Well, the point is this," said the Colonel. "Chrissey de Selden thinks herself guilty of Neyland's death because of a letter she sent him refusing to marry him. She's in love with Warburton!"

"What!" exclaimed the Duke.

"I knew it. I was sure of it, only I didn't dare say so," burst out Rose.

"She told me so herself."

"Well, then everything will be easy and that poor girl will——"

"Not so fast," interposed the Colonel; "on the contrary everything is miserably complicated and I don't know what to do."

"Explain further, my dear Colonel."

"It's this way. She hasn't the faintest idea that that pool went to smash, that Neyland's fortune and hers were lost. She doesn't dream that she's penniless. She thinks she's a richer woman than ever before and she intends to give Neyland's fortune, left her by will, to charity, and she wants

to give all the profits that she thinks she has made out of her fortune to John Warburton whom she pictures as a crushed, ruined man."

"*Per Dio!*" exclaimed Di Attavanti.

"And this isn't all. Warburton, as you know, charged me to convey Chrissey de Selden's original fortune, which was all swept away in the failure, back to her. I told him she would not accept anything from him and he said I should go about it by indirection. I told her that he would not accept anything from her and she told me to go about that by indirection also! What am I to do?"

"It is indeed a difficult situation."

"Difficult? It is impossible, so I am telling this to you and asking your advice."

"Advice," repeated the Duke, getting up and pacing the floor nervously. "I must think. I must consider. It is not an easy problem."

"Easy! I repeat it's impossible."

"I'll tell you one thing you can do, Father," said the practical Rose, "you can relieve her mind as to her letter having caused Mr. Neyland's death."

"How?"

"By giving it back to her."

"I don't understand."

"Oh, Father, Father," said the girl, "you're so interested in big business that little things escape you. Where is that letter she wrote him that you took from Mr. Neyland's hand and did not give to the coroner, wicked old man that you are?"

"Here it is," said the Colonel. "I intended to give it to her this morning but in view of this complication I don't know what to do."

"Look at it, Father, look at it, Enrico. What do you two wiseacres deduce from it?"

"Why, *mia carissima*, nothing in particular."

"What do you mean, Rose?"

"It has never been opened, stupids."

"Of course. That's quite evident," said the Colonel.

"Ah, he started to tear open the envelope and then thought better of it, for what reason, I know not, is it not so, my Rose?" said the Duke quickly.

"It is so indeed, *mio sapiente Enrico*," said the Duchess lightly.

"But why?" asked the Colonel.

"I think I can guess why he didn't open it," answered his daughter promptly with a woman's swift intuition; "he felt himself unworthy after his fall."

"Of course," said the Colonel; "I knew that we hadn't fathomed the depth of your insight."

"*Carina*," said the little Duke approvingly, "it is undoubtedly as you say."

"Therefore," continued Rose with inexorable logic, "if she imagines that her letter caused his suicide it will be easy to prove her wrong by returning it."

"It is very simple," said the Duke.

"Well, that helps a little," said the Colonel, "but how about Warburton? There is the

greater problem. I really couldn't violate my promise to her by revealing to him all that she said about not loving Neyland and loving Warburton."

"No, you couldn't but I could," said Rose promptly.

Both men stared at her in dismay.

"Rose," said the Colonel, "I charge you to say nothing about this matter either to Chrissey or John Warburton until I give you leave."

"It grieves me to oppose you in anything, *mia carissima*," said the Duke gravely, "and I am far from wishing to exercise any authority, but I am sure you will respect your father's request, which is my own."

"Oh, very well," said Rose, somewhat abashed by the gravity of the two men, "I won't say anything until you give me leave, but if you'd let me I could settle it in ten minutes by telephoning Mr. Warburton and sending him instantly to Chris. I'm sure they could adjust their differences after the briefest of conversations."

"I'm not so sure of that," said the Colonel, "but there may be something in the idea. At any rate we've got to decide upon some course of action, and whatever we decide will be wrong from one point of view and right from another."

"Exactly, my dear Colonel," said the Duke gravely. "Let us reflect upon it."

"While you're both reflecting," said the irrepressible Rose, "try to think more of the happiness of the two than of your honour."

There was a tap on the door at this moment. Bidden to enter, one of the footmen brought in a card which he handed to the Duchess.

"Speaking of angels," she exclaimed, although no one had been so doing. "This card bears the name of Father Stuart-Smith of Bermuda."

"He is the Priest who tried to help Chrissey. I remember him perfectly," said the Colonel. "She told me she was going to Bermuda to ask his advice as to her future career. She thinks she has not yet made sufficient expiation."

"In my country, a nunnery——"

"Now, Enrico," burst out Rose, "don't spoil the chances of happiness of the two persons we are so fond of by suggesting a nunnery."

"To serve God, to seek to repair injuries of which we have been the witting or unwitting cause, by devoting oneself to His work is surely not unworthy even of those so highly placed and greatly endowed as our friends."

"*Enrico mio*," said the Duchess coming over to him and sitting down on the arm of the chair near which he was standing and looking up at him in a way that he found surpassingly charming, "haven't you been happy with me?"

"Beyond my wildest dream, *carissima*."

"And haven't I been happy with you?"

"You have led me so to believe in spite of my own unworthiness."

Rose reached up her arm and drew his head

down toward her and kissed him boldly, quite oblivious of her father's presence.

"I want poor Chris and Mr. Warburton to have a little happiness like ours."

"But there will always be something between them."

"Yes," said the Colonel, "but in spite of that they may do fairly well, I think."

"We are keeping Father Smith waiting," said Rose. "I have an idea that his counsel may be of service."

"I couldn't share Chrissey's confidence even with a Priest of the Church," said the old Colonel, "but he comes at an opportune time. We will send him to her. She'll see him, I'm sure."

Father Smith's presence was soon explained. He had come up from Bermuda on a well-earned vacation. He had called on Warburton to seek tidings of his wife. Warburton had insisted upon taking him into his house and as he was detained at the office had sent him up with a letter assigning him to the care of the Duchess, who was dispensing its hospitality.

The two men and the woman were fascinated, as everybody was, with the sweetness and light so wondrously mingled with the shrewd worldly wisdom of the old ecclesiastic. They told him the whole story or as much of it as they could.

"I will go to see her at once," said the Priest. "It is still early in the afternoon. There is something back of it all. You are concealing something."

He put his hand out deprecatingly to still the outbreak of protest.

"I understand exactly why you should feel under certain restraint and I honour you for it. Mrs. Warburton——"

"Miss de Selden, since the divorce," said the Colonel.

"That has not altered things," said the old man. "She is still a wife. She must give me her own confidence and perhaps by the will of God I can help her."

"By heaven, sir," burst out the Colonel, "if you can help her it will be more than any of the rest of us can. There are some other things I can tell you." He put the Priest quickly in possession of the delusion that Chrissey entertained about the state of her fortune and her attitude toward Warburton as well as the realities of the case and Warburton's intentions toward her. "These facts you will, of course, not animadvert upon to her until she tells you herself."

"You may leave everything to my discretion, gentlemen, and you Duchess," said Father Smith. "If I can help her I shall and I trust that God will show me the way."

CHAPTER XXXIX

STILL PLAYING THE GAME

JOHN WARBURTON knew that Colonel Tayloe had seen Chrissey de Selden that afternoon. His eagerness to see the Colonel after that interview was perhaps the keenest desire that had ever possessed him, but a series of extraordinary demands kept him at his desk. A man could not pass through such a battle as he had but two days before without involving himself in a multiplicity of adjustments which were imperative in their demands. Although no man could work more quickly and no man had mastered the nice art of settling a question and a questioner briefly and accurately better than he it was impossible to get away early. It was maddening but he was detained for some hours after his usual time for departure.

Men like John Warburton, concentrated, self-centred, imperious, when they determine upon a course are apt to be absolutely devoted to it. He had loved late in life. He knew that his passion for Chrissey de Selden was as eternal as the stars. Sometimes in the privacy of his chamber he gave way to bitter grief and longing. It is not in

humanity to maintain for ever an outward impassivity. There must be occasional solutions of the continuity of self-repression, else the soul would break. And these outbursts of which no one knew and which he was even ashamed that God should see, saved him from going to pieces utterly. He was near such a break then. Singular how thought of one small woman affected men so different in temperament as Neyland and Warburton!

Having at last, as he supposed, disposed of everything most pressing he closed and locked his desk, seized his hat, and started for the door only to be confronted by his confidential clerk with a statement that Mr. Billy Alton wanted to see him.

"Tell him I can't see him," was the curt answer.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the clerk, "Mr. Alton expected that would be your answer and he said that it was a matter of life and death to him. He said you knew him well enough to realize that he wouldn't say that unless it were true and he added that probably five minutes of your time would be enough for him."

"Send him in," said Warburton.

He did not like Alton, he despised his species. So far as he could Alton had been back of the attack against him but that he should come to Warburton now interested him. He did not sit down, he stood by his desk and confronted the other as he came through the door. Alton had always taken life easily. A *bon vivant*, an epicure, a

pleasure-seeker, he had heretofore allowed nothing to ruffle his serenity. Now he looked old and shrunken, withered, haggard.

"Mr. Warburton," he began nervously, "I appreciate that if you were any other man my course in coming to you would be absurd and impossible."

"I'm in great haste," returned Mr. Warburton, bowing slightly in acknowledgment of what the other evidently meant to be complimentary. "But that your business according to your message was as brief as it was important I should not have seen you."

"I appreciate that and thank you."

"Will you explain just what you want as quickly as possible?" went on the other, a little touch of pity in his iron heart, so abject and miserable was the aspect of the man whom he had known so debonair and insouciant in other days.

"Mr. Warburton, I want to ask you for work."

"What sort of work?"

"Any that you can give me."

"Why apply to me?"

"Well, sir, you're the only man I ever fought against very hard. This unfortunate combination was due in some measure to my arrangement and that we came so near beating you I think testifies in some degree to my ability. This is the only real business I have ever essayed and although it doesn't seem much of a recommend-

ation, I'll admit, when I have been so badly beaten, in fact ruined, still I think it is an evidence that I'm good for something as a fighter anyway."

Warburton smiled slightly, his grim features relaxing a little.

"It is a recommendation, for you played no small part in the combination, I understand, you and your friend Neyland"—his jaw tightened and his lips stiffened as he bit that name out—"and I'll say this, that never in my business career have I been compelled to fight harder and never have I won victory more narrowly."

"I knew you were a big enough man to see it that way," said Alton simply. "The point is if I can do such good work against you what mightn't I do with you?"

"But why do you want to go to work?"

"Put it that I've enjoyed the game," answered Alton evasively.

"That won't do. If you work for me there must be absolute confidence between us."

"Well, say that I've lost everything and have got to go to work, then."

"Good so far as it goes but not far enough. You're not the man to get in your present vein because you've lost your money. By the way, can't I offer you something?"

"Not me," said Alton, emphatically turning his back on the buffet. "I've quit it. I quit it before the crash and if I hadn't done it then the thought of Neyland——"

"Don't bring him into the conversation."

"The truth is the loss of my money is the least of my troubles."

"What else have you lost?"

"My wife."

"Ah!"

"And so I came to you——"

"On the supposition that a fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind, Mr. Alton?"

"Before God, no! I never thought of that. Now that I've made so frightful a blunder the only thing is to withdraw and thank you for having heard me."

"Wait. We're in the same boat in one sense and I'm disposed to help you provided you will give me your full confidence."

"Read this, then," said Alton, handing a crumpled note to Warburton.

"I have observed," said the latter, "that men do many things on impulse for which they are afterwards very sorry, especially when it comes to revealing their intimate personal concerns. Do you really desire me to read this letter, which appears to be"—he glanced at it—"a private communication from a woman?"

"From my wife. I want you to read it. It's back of my request. For God's sake, sir, if I don't get something to do I'll go crazy."

Warburton considerably turned his back on Alton, stepped over to the light, and unfolded the letter. And thus it ran:

DEAR BILLY:

Well, it's all over. The combination failed. Warburton made monkeys of you all. You should have known better than to fight him. You told me last night that your money was gone, so I knew it was time for me to beat it. I can't live without all those things to which I've been accustomed and for which I've sacrificed so much. I was a fool to give you my money, to put into the pool but you seemed so sure, you and Dick Neyland. I don't mind confessing to you that I kept back enough to enable me to make another visit to Reno and keep me going for a breathing time thereafter. I'm still a young woman and there's as good fish in the seas as ever were caught and one or two are biting at the hook now. This will be hard for you at first but it won't matter much in the long run. You can get another wife. The possibilities are as plenty as blackberries in New York and by the same token I can get another husband. You've got so infernally good anyway since you went into business that we aren't congenial any more. We had a fine time together while it lasted. Let's part without any regrets on either side. And by the way, since you must be pretty hard up and since I've got a few thousand ahead myself, more than I'll need until I get settled again—I didn't give you everything you see—I enclose you a check for five thousand dollars, which I had certified at the bank this morning. It will tide you over a little while perhaps. I did like you, Billy, and I'm awfully sorry you're down and out and that you can't play the game with me any longer.

Yours in undying remembrance if not affection,

BECKY.

Warburton handed the letter back to Alton without a word.

"Nice letter," said Billy miserably, "isn't it?"

"I shall not presume to comment on it, Mr. Alton. It speaks for itself. It gives you abundant reason, however, to desire to do something. I know myself that work is the best medicine for a case like that."

"I thought so, too," answered Alton simply.

"I'll take you into my office. I think I see where I can utilize the abilities you seem to possess, but before we settle upon it finally let me ask you one question. What did you do with that certified check?"

"Mailed it to her at once. I knew her Reno address."

"Good!" said Warburton. "I shouldn't have had any use for you if you had accepted anything from her under the circumstances. Now if you're in need of money——"

"It's not as bad as that," said Alton. "I have a little. What I want is work."

"Just so. As I said before I'm very busy. If you will come down to the office tomorrow afternoon we can arrange your employment and compensation."

"Mr. Warburton," exclaimed Alton, "I don't know how to thank you. It was worth while fighting you to get white treatment like this. I'll work my fingers to the bone for you. It's all I've got."

"You're young yet," said Warburton bitterly; "you'll find many things in life before you."

CHAPTER XL

OVERRULED

As it chanced Warburton and Father Smith met at the door of the house.

"Have you only just arrived, Father Smith?" asked Warburton in some surprise. "You should have been here hours ago. Has the chauffeur—?"

"On the contrary," answered the Priest. "I was delivered with commendable promptness and received with charming hospitality by your friend Colonel Tayloe and the Duke and Duchess. I have been out to—" He stopped abruptly. The two gentlemen had reached the door. Father Smith looked long and earnestly at his host. "I've been out to make a call," he resumed at last, suddenly deciding on his course.

"Indeed. I didn't know that you were acquainted in New York. I thought——"

"I know few people beside you and your wife."

"I have no doubt you mean well, I'm sure," said Warburton bending forward to hide the wave of emotion which had swept over him, "but that lady is no longer named in this household." He

turned the key and opened the door. "Forgive me," he continued briefly, "will you enter?"

"Is there a place where we can talk just a moment undisturbed?" asked Father Smith.

"There is the little reception room yonder."

"Give me a few minutes then."

"Of course, but may I repeat that I do not wish to hear anything about——"

"Mr. Warburton," said Father Smith, closing the door of the little room, "sometimes it is a man's duty to disregard the injunctions of men and follow a clear indication from God."

"Surely, sir, I am not transgressing the limits of hospitality in asking you as my guest to refrain from one topic?"

He stood very straight. He could discuss his affairs with a man like Colonel Tayloe and the business to be adjusted gave him an excuse but it was different with this somewhat strange and decidedly not very old acquaintance. He looked very grim and ruthless as he drew himself up but Father Smith was not in the least abashed.

"Even the laws of hospitality," he went on indomitably, "must bow before such an obligation as is laid upon me."

"Have you by any chance a message for me from my—that lady?"

"A thousand," was the amazing answer, "not one of which I can deliver, because I am bound in honour to silence."

"Well, sir, why speak at all?"

"But I am not bound in honour to inaction."

"And what would you do?"

"Send you to call upon your wife."

"Impossible!"

"Look at me, Mr. Warburton. Am I a man carried away by transient emotion, apt to give counsel not to be heeded, indiscreet?"

"You look sane enough, but your words, your excited bearing——"

"I am as composed as you are."

"But I am not at all composed, sir. You have annoyed me greatly with your doubtless well meant attempts at——"

"Nay, I am certain that I am less disturbed than you are, for I know your agitation must be extreme despite your iron self-control. Let me ask you one question. Upon your answer will depend my further course. Do you still love your wife?"

Warburton drew himself up more erect than ever if possible. This was passing all bounds. He was properly and righteously indignant.

"I recognize no right——" he said, smiting his hands together with a fierce gesture of indignation.

"Your answer," cried the other as imperiously as if he had been the soldier he started out to be.

"Why should I disguise it?" said Warburton at last. "Although you have no right to ask I admit that I do. A man of my temperament and years loves but once, sir."

"My dear sir, men of different temperament who

have longpassed your years can say the same thing. Your answer has decided me. I have one injunction to lay upon you. Go to your wife at once."

"Why?"

"I cannot tell you more than that."

"Did she suggest to you?"

"She didn't hint it in the remotest way. She doesn't dream that I am saying this to you and I am coming as near violating my plighted word in doing so as a man can."

"I will think on it," said Warburton strangely moved.

"May I come in?" asked Rose and without waiting for permission she opened the door. "Excuse me, Father Smith, but father and the Duke want to see you in the library. Mr. Warburton, they have something to say to you."

"Oh, Duchess," said Father Smith, "you came at an inopportune time, forgive me that I say it. I had just about persuaded Mr. Warburton to do what I asked him and you give him a chance to hesitate and refuse."

"And what did you ask?"

"I forbid you to discuss the matter further," exclaimed Warburton.

But the indomitable Priest went on.

"I told him to go to his wife."

"No man was ever given better advice," said the Duchess to the amazement of both.

"Madam, you will help me?" asked the Priest greatly relieved.

"Help you, of course I will. Wait." She turned to the door and called her father and husband. In a moment the two gentlemen presented themselves. "Father Smith," exclaimed Rose, "has just come from Chrissey de Selden. He and Mr. Warburton came in together. I saw them meet just outside the door. After they came into this room I waited as long as I could and then I came in. Father Smith has just given Mr. Warburton a piece of advice."

"It's a frightful piece of presumption," said Warburton sternly, "that my affairs should be discussed in this public manner. I must request——"

"John," interrupted the old Colonel, "we are all friends of yours, the best friends you have, and we all love Chrissey de Selden. We want her happiness as much as yours. Father Smith is a man of wisdom and discretion. His advice is to be heeded. He is a man to be trusted."

"I thank you, sir."

"What did you advise him to do?"

"To go to see his wife at once."

"Why, God bless me!" said the Colonel, "I never thought of that, but it does seem to settle the question. No course, I am persuaded, could be better than that."

"I swore that I would never go near her again. I must keep that pledge unless she should send for me, but in this case——"

"I can only repeat Father Smith's advice,"

interposed the Colonel. "What do you say, Duke?"

"You must go, sir," answered Di Attavanti, promptly seconding his father-in-law.

"Impossible."

"Now look at us, John. I'm your oldest friend. I've known you since you were a boy. Also I have been closer to Chrissey de Selden than any one else, and Rose is her dearest friend. The discretion and sound common sense of my son-in-law have often been noted between us. Here is a Priest of the Church the confidant of your wife. We all say exactly the same thing. The woman is in trouble. She is lonely. She is heart-broken."

"Do you want me to go and console her for the death of Neyland or for the loss of her fortune?" was the bitter question.

"Don't be a fool, John," said the Colonel brusquely. "She doesn't need consoling for the death of Neyland."

"You are verging on a violation of confidence my dear sir," said the Priest.

"Can anything be plainer?" said the old Colonel, appealing to Warburton; "and as for her fortune," he went on, "she thinks you are ruined and she has it all. There isn't any one alive or dead whom she would rather see than you."

"Does she expect that I——"

"Of course she doesn't. She thinks we are all honourable men. She has trusted us and thinks we would not betray her and we have all done it."

"As for me, sir, I'm glad we did it," said the Priest; "but go now, Mr. Warburton, before I completely ruin myself."

"She wouldn't receive me."

"I've thought of that," said Father Smith. "If you will allow me to go with you I will gain you access to her."

"I won't do it."

"Oh, Mr. Warburton, if a woman's heart, a woman's soul, a woman's love, mean anything to you go to her," cried Rose, coming over to him and laying her hand on his shoulder and looking up into his iron face beseechingly.

Warburton thought for a long time while the others watched him in silence. It was sweet Rose's plea that finally decided him. That and the wild craving to see his wife that was always present in his heart.

"Very well, since you will all have it so I will go," he said at last and the anticipation of seeing her overwhelmed his reluctance to submit to the overruling of the others. Not daring to speak another word he turned toward the door.

"I'm coming, sir," said Father Smith following him.

"Just a moment," interrupted the Colonel, "here are a couple of letters."

He proffered Warburton the two papers.

"What are these?"

"One is a letter from your wife to Neyland."

"Take it away," said Warburton harshly.

"No," said the Colonel. "You must take it to her. Believe me in spite of our present course I am as nice on the point of honour as any man on earth. I wouldn't ask you to do it unless it were right, unless her happiness and your own were involved. You are to give it to her when she reproaches herself, as she will, for the death of Neyland. You are to tell her that I took it from Neyland's dead hand. You will call her attention to the fact that it has not been opened, that someone began to open it and stopped, therefore it has not been read."

It was a new thing for Warburton to be overruled, made to bend his will to someone else. He stood stubborn and defiant.

"Trust me, Mr. Warburton," said Rose swiftly. "I know that Father is right."

"And I," added the little Duke.

Warburton looked at Father Smith.

"I cannot help you there, sir," he said, "except to say that I think whatever counsel those good friends give should be heeded."

"What is the other paper?" asked Warburton.

"It is Neyland's last letter to your wife."

"But you are asking the impossible," cried Warburton.

"No, they both go together."

"I must be a weak fool for you to think for a moment that I——"

"You are going to show yourself a stronger man than ever before," said the Colonel.

"Indeed, I think so, too," said the Priest.

"And I, and I," exclaimed the Duke and Duchess in unison.

Now if Warburton had not been so madly in love with his wife, if he had not so passionately yearned for a sight of her he would even then have turned a deaf ear to these entreaties. The strongest is sometimes weak for a moment and it is well that it should be so. Unchanging strength is an attribute of omnipotence alone. Still, to take those letters! It was impossible. Wise old Father Smith helped him out of that difficult situation.

"I'll take the letters, I'll present them to her myself, and then you can see her."

"What shall I say? What shall I do? What is the object of the visit?"

"Nay," said Father Smith imperturbably, "we can give you no further advice." He was in excellent spirits now. "You will, I firmly believe, be in God's hands and both of you will know what to say and what to do."

"Always remember, Warburton, that she thinks you are a ruined man and she a rich woman," cried the Colonel after his departing friends.

Chrissey de Selden was very much surprised to learn that Father Smith wanted to see her again so soon after his departure, but she knew that nothing unimportant would have brought him to her a second time. According to his habit he went directly to the matter that had brought him back so soon as he saw her.

"Colonel Tayloe was so surprised this afternoon that he did not give you these," began Father Smith.

Chrissey de Selden seized the two papers, dropped one and concentrated her gaze upon the other.

"My letter!" she exclaimed, "the last one I wrote."

"Exactly. You will notice that it has not been opened. Evidently Mr. Neyland started to break the envelope and stopped. The letter was never read."

The woman rose to her feet and flung her hands up with a great cry of relief.

"He didn't know, he didn't know, oh thank God, he didn't know!"

"True," said the Priest. "He didn't know what you wrote to him and whatever he did was not caused by anything in that letter."

"Oh, how thankful I am! What is the other paper?"

"His own last words to you."

She tore open the envelope. She read the passionate, hopeless, bitter farewell, the last effort at exculpation and then she dropped the paper on the table by her own still unopened letter.

"Poor man," she said quickly, "poor man, but I'm glad he didn't read that letter. It takes away some of the burden that has so heavily weighed upon me."

"Just so, Madam. And please God we shall

soon take away the balance. Mrs. Warburton"—she was glad he never called her anything else but that although she had no right to the title—"if you will indulge me a little"—he stepped toward her and took her gently by the arm, and turning her face to the window, he led her there,—“wait just a moment, don't look around until I speak again.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just promise me that.”

“Very well.”

He stepped softly to the door. He beckoned with his hand. Warburton, white and nervous, came through the door. The Priest pointed to the little figure outlined against the fading light of the late afternoon before the window. Warburton stood trembling and staring, his whole heart out-rushing toward that slender figure whose drooping curves suggested melancholy and sadness illimitable. He forgot Father Smith, he forgot everything but that he was here and she was there. Father Smith stepped back of the man, passed through the door, drew it after him until it was almost shut.

“Mrs. Warburton!” he called sharply and then closed the door.

CHAPTER XLI

THE SURRENDER

WITHOUT suspicion the woman turned. Her glance swept the room, until it rested upon the figure before the door. Her back was to the light, her face in the shadow. The colour that flamed there and then receded, leaving her paler than before, might have told Warburton something, but in the twilight of the waning day he could not even see the rapid rise and fall of her bosom although he did not fail to note the swiftness with which her left hand went to her heart.

He was in the full illumination of whatever light there was. She saw him clearly. His self-control had not entirely deserted him but never in her life had she seen him so moved. He was trembling, his lips twitched a little nervously. It was hard to say which was the more agitated, but she seemed the more composed and as usual it was she who broke the silence.

"You!" she faltered, her voice low and tense, almost a whisper. "Why did you come?"

"I hardly know," he answered, taking refuge in the commonplaces inevitable under the cir-

cumstances. "If I'm unwelcome, I'll go, of course."

She made no answer for a moment. She was trying desperately for self-control. She had known that she loved him but until that moment she had not dreamed how much.

"I was badly advised," he went on. "It was not my wish. I came against my will. I shouldn't have intruded——"

"I wouldn't have you stay a moment if it should not be your pleasure," she said at last, her heart sinking as she averted her head.

"Christianna," he burst out suddenly and now the formal name she had disliked sounded sweetly in her ear, "I haven't told you the truth"—he threw reserve and restraint to the winds and made a step nearer her. "They did urge me to come, all of them. I resisted them a long time but not because I did not wish to come. I made them think I yielded to their entreaties at last when all the time I longed to look at you again, just to see you once more. I know that you care nothing for me, that you cannot. I don't blame you. I should never have married you. But my love for you, which has steadily grown greater until it fairly obsesses me, made me come. Forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive," she murmured, but he went on unheeding, the words rushing forth torrentially, under the strong pressure of long pent-up emotion.

"I thought that I would hear your voice, that I

would see you, that by some happy chance I might even touch your hand, and then that I could go away and in the strength of that touch and that sight and that memory I could live on. I thought it would help me to ease this horrible pain, to bear my lonely lot. I was mistaken. It makes it harder. I am not one to take defeat easily and the sight of you after all these months, standing there as you are"—she was wearing an exquisite afternoon *négligée* or tea-gown, which somehow added a touch of intimacy to the association and which intensified his feeling—"I can't stand it. I must go now. I shouldn't have come. I miscalculated my strength. Good God, Christianna, won't you even speak to me?"

"I'm very glad you came," said the woman, her heart beating, her soul thrilling to the passionate tenderness of his appeal. "I have a great deal that I want to say to you now that you are here. I should never have presumed to invite you. I'm not worthy of that love you say you feel."

"Say I feel?"

"I'm not worthy of any man's love. I hate myself and—but we mustn't go on this way. Sit there, please. Now let me talk to you a little and then you can bid me good-bye and it will be—all over."

For the life of her, for the soul of her, she could not help the break in her voice then. Warburton noticed it but he did not dare to presume. He was sensible that the crisis in his fortunes and hers

had arrived. Rude handling of the delicate situation might shatter for ever the hope that would spring up in his breast, that would not down. At least they were together in the same room talking intimately. That was something gained. He followed her direction without hesitation.

"It will be necessary for me to say things that pain you, I'm afraid," she began.

"I should rather hear you say things that pain me than hear anything from anybody else, so long as it is you who speak," he protested.

"After I got that divorce which you told me to get—" she could not resist that thrust.

"Would that my tongue had been paralysed before I made the suggestion, but I thought——"

"Yes, you thought and I thought that I loved Mr. Neyland, but I found out that I did not and until this afternoon I thought that my telling him so had caused him to kill himself, but now I know that he did not open my letter and that burden has been lifted from me—thank God. But I don't want to talk of him. I know that you are a ruined man and I want to give you my share of the profits of Mr. Neyland's combination that were made by the investment of my fortune. I want you to take that to start with. I shall have my own fortune left, which will be ample for my needs. I want you to know that I'm not going to take Mr. Neyland's money. That shall be given away where it will do the most good to people who may thereby rise up in after years and call him blessed. What

I am giving you is my own or rather it is our own."

"But I couldn't."

"You must," she returned promptly with a pretty insistence that delighted him. "I know what my father left me was only a trifle compared with what you made of it by your judicious investments. Colonel Tayloe told me that, so really it is your own. Oh, please, won't you take it from me? I'll tell you something else," she went on as he stared at her in growing surprise. "I had this in mind when I gave my securities to Mr. Neyland. I thought when the battle was over I would be in a position to give you back all that had been made for me. You will take it? I told Colonel Tayloe that he must make you but he said that was impossible, that you would know and he couldn't do it. I didn't know how I was to bring it about but since you came to me here—and I wouldn't for a moment have you feel that I'm not glad that you came—I think the best way is to tell you plainly, and ask you please to give me this chance to make amends."

"Christianna," he said unconsciously continuing the old form of address and for the third time in her life she rejoiced in the quaint name, which no one else had ever employed, "before I accede to your request——"

"Oh, then you will?"

"Let me ask you a question. Will you answer it?"

"Yes."

"You refused to marry Richard Neyland?"

"I did."

"Was it because you found that you did not love him?"

"Yes," answered the woman, her voice a low whisper, her heart at a standstill.

"And does that mean that—" He could scarcely bear to put the question. "Do you think you could learn—Oh God!" he cried rising and coming toward her. She drew back a little but did not rise or lift her head. "Do you think that you—I dare not ask. My whole future turns on the question. Life or death, heaven or hell, are in your answer."

"Speak on," she whispered

"Do you think you could learn to—care—a—little—for me?"

She shook her head.

"Ah," said the man almost as if he had been stabbed. "I was a fool to dream it."

"Not a fool," she interposed swiftly, "but blind."

"Blind!"

"Yes."

She rose slowly to her feet and forced herself to look at him. Into her cheeks came a flame like a flag. Boldly she spoke and well.

"I couldn't learn to love you a little because I—I——"

"Christianna," he cried seizing her in his arms.

He lifted her little figure up in the air and then brought her down and held her close against his heart. If he had only acted that way before, she thought. And then he kissed her upon the lips as he had never kissed her before and she did not withdraw her own from him. At last he released her a little and as she could free an arm she slipped it around his neck and gave him back caress for caress, met endearment with endearment, heart throb with heart throb. The man sank down on his knees before her. He stretched his hands up toward her as a devotee of old might have worshipped a divinity.

"Not that way," she said, stooping over him and raising him up. "It is I who should be there. I've been such a wicked woman. You don't know everything."

"I don't want to know," he said stoutly although his heart sank a little and she was quick to see his fear.

"Oh, I'm as fit to be your wife as any woman, but I've been such a fool. I've wrecked my life and your own."

"You can repair mine and if you give me the chance I will repair yours."

"I can't. You don't know. You remember he—he—insulted me at Sorrento and I condoned it and—he kissed me that evening you saw us at Bermuda and once again at Billy Alton's house before I left. I'm not fit for such love as yours."

"You can't help that," said Warburton practi-

cally. "I'm sorry for those things, I hate him for them, but you are mine and I'm not going to give you up."

"You must. I shall expiate. I want to do some good in the world."

"You can do all the good you wish but you're going to begin with me. I'll help you do good to everybody else. I've had enough of business and——"

"Yes, if you only had what you had before. My fortune won't go very far, but you'll take it won't you?"

"On one condition."

"And what is that?"

"That you give me yourself with it."

"I cannot. It wouldn't be right for any human being who has behaved as I to have such happiness."

"Very well then, I'll go out a beggar, such a beggar as I never dreamed I would be, having your love and not having you."

"But don't you see I can't? It would be absurd—I—what would the world say?"

"What do I care what any one says? You can, you shall."

The old masterful John Warburton, whose dominance in the past she had hated, but which now she loved, released her and set her down in a chair tenderly but rather forcibly nevertheless and then turned to the door.

"Where are you going?"

"To call Father Smith."

"What for?"

"To marry us again."

"Oh, but I——"

He paid no attention to her protestations. Father Smith was close at hand. At his name he came.

"Well," he said to Warburton, "was I right?"

"Right," exclaimed the man, "God bless you for ever!"

"Did you tell him what I said?" asked the woman.

"Not one word."

"Then how?"

"I just brought him here. You did not swear me not to do that."

"I'm glad that you did," said the girl, "and now I want you to tell him that I cannot marry him, that I have not been punished enough, that I should not——"

"Can't marry him!" exclaimed the old man to their great astonishment, "why you are married to him already."

"But the divorce," faltered Chrissey.

"Whom God hath joined," said the Priest solemnly, "no power can put asunder."

"You see," said Warburton, "he agrees with me. You are my wife already. You have always been my wife. I was going to ask you to marry us again but it is unnecessary."

"Of course," said the zealous old Churchman,

"you have been married by the Church and by nothing you can do, by no means that you can employ, can you unmarry yourselves."

"Is that the Church's view?" asked the woman.

"Most certainly."

"But if you can't marry us, what about divorce?"

"Let the State undo what it has done," answered Father Smith tersely. "If the State unmarried you or pretended to do so, in order to comply with all the requirements of the law and to stand legally man and wife, as you are morally man and wife, go and get yourselves married again by the State."

"Do you mean by a justice of the peace? I couldn't bear that," exclaimed the woman.

"You must, but after that come to me," said the inexorable old man. "I'll get the Rector to let us have the Little Church Around the Corner and after you have been remarried by the State, which presumed to unmarry you, come there."

"And you will marry us again?"

"No, but I will give you the Church's blessing on your amendment and reparation. And may you both be very happy as I am sure you will. You have been led through devious paths into each other's arms. It has been given you after days of blindness at last to see each other's hearts. What has passed you can never forget but together you can rise in love above the remembrance."

CHAPTER XLII

ONCE MORE A WEDDING NIGHT

It was quite a different service and ceremony—that little sacramental rite of prayers and blessings—from that at St. Thomas's less than a year before. There were present only the Duke, the Duchess, old Colonel Tayloe, and the faithful maid, yes lurking in a far corner was poor, forlorn Billy Alton, unobserved by all except a plain humble man named Judson, who was thinking of his master and what might have been, as old Father Smith laid his hands in benediction upon the two bowed heads, John Warburton's streaked with grey from what he had gone through, Chrissey de Selden's midnight crown still untouched with the white of years and troubles.

In the big car once more, the farewells said, the two who had come together after such far voyaging through such troubled seas were at last alone.

"Where are you taking me?" asked the girl.

"To the house in the hills where we went before. We will take up the thread of life just where we broke it off."

"Yes," whispered the woman, nestling close to

him and resting her head against his shoulder and slipping her hand within his own.

They would have much to talk about in the future, these two, but as they swiftly sped over the smooth roads toward the lodge in the wild hills overlooking the great river it was heart that spoke to heart, hand pressure that met hand pressure, in the silence. Once only did Warburton venture upon a bit of rational conversation.

"My dearest wife," he began in that somewhat old-fashioned way, choosing an opportune moment. "I can't begin our married life without perfect confidence and I have a confession to make."

"Do you love me still, John?"

"More than ever."

"So long as that is true nothing else matters."

"Good! You make it easy," but he hesitated nevertheless.

"Go on," she said at last.

"Well, the fact is I'm not quite the beggar you thought me."

"Did you save something from the wreck?"

"Er—yes—a little."

"Then that added to what I made will be enough won't it? For now all that I have is yours."

"Yes, but, well,—the fact is I didn't lose."

"What!"

"No, I wasn't beaten."

"Did you win?" she asked in an awestruck voice, thinking if that were true how poor Neyland had indeed lost everything.

"I did," he answered, and somehow he seemed to experience an odd feeling of shame in the situation, just why he could not tell.

"Then you don't need my poor little money," she said at last in deep disappointment, "and I was so glad to give it to you."

"You have given me yourself, Christianna, dearest little wife in the world, and no gift could equal that."

"I know but—John Warburton," she exclaimed, suddenly seeing the truth at last, "if you won I lost with the rest."

He averted his face.

"Answer me," she persisted. "Was I ruined too?"

"I tried my best to save your fortune, I would have given it back to you, I——"

"And have I anything of my own?"

"Only me," very humbly he spoke, "and all that I have is yours," he added softly.

"You're enough," said the woman nestling against him.

So that danger was past and over. Only she was sorry that she could not get away from the consciousness of Neyland's double failure. At that hour to have to think of him! Alas! she was doomed to find the thought of him obtruding in other hours as inopportune as that—and thus part of her punishment came.

Everything at the lodge was just as it had been before. Nothing had been changed. The same

servants, carefully trained to give no expression to their surprise, awaited them. They sat for a little time after breaking bread together while the sun set and the darkness came and then the woman rose. She put her hand upon her husband's shoulder to keep him where he was in his chair. She bent and kissed him.

"In a few moments," she said and she was gone.

So she came again into that room which she had entered in so different a mood not a year before. She stood and looked about at the familiar objects. Nothing had been changed. Through the open windows the night wind stirred softly the pines in the hills. How she loved the wholesome fragrance of the great conifers! So much more appealing to her soul than the heavy cloying perfume of oleanders—ah! No, she would think of nothing but of her husband, waiting below, as she would presently await him above.

She remembered how afraid and cold at heart and filled with terror she had been on that other night. Now her heart beat warmly beneath her still virginal bosom. Love—and all was different. A wave of feeling swept over her, a rush of colour came to her cheeks; her neck, her whole body was flooded with it. Now her hand went slowly to the brooch that clasped her dress low at her throat.

Warburton could not sit still. He got up and walked across the room and opened a window look-

ing out upon the river. It was a heavenly night, the moon high in the heavens flooded the valley with light. The great still, slow-moving deep of the river gleamed white before him. His love was like that river. And she? The moon was not fairer, purer, or higher above him. He thanked God for the strong, sweet odour of the pines. No tropic sweetness of oleander—ah! No, he would think of nothing but of his wife whom he heard moving overhead.

He closed the window and went to the foot of the stairs and stood leaning lightly against the newel post. He waited there with bended head. He did not dare to look up. And he could not go until she called him. He had said it long ago. He found he needed the massive post of the rail to steady him. His heart beat so that it shook him.

As he listened there came a gentle click-clacking of heels along the hall. It stopped hard by and still he could not raise his head. He had sworn that she must summon him. He waited for her word, acutely conscious of her nearness. A voice breathed his name. Then at last he raised his head.

From a cloud of delicate white drapery she stood looking down upon him, a little smile upon her face, the whiteness of her robe accentuated by the light and colour that flamed in her cheeks, seen clearly in the soft light of the room. She, too, was trembling. Her body shook with her emotion. In her hand

she held something bright that gleamed in the electric light like gold and silver. It was the key of a door!

As he stared she breathed his name a second time. Then John, the victor, mounted the stair.

THE END.

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